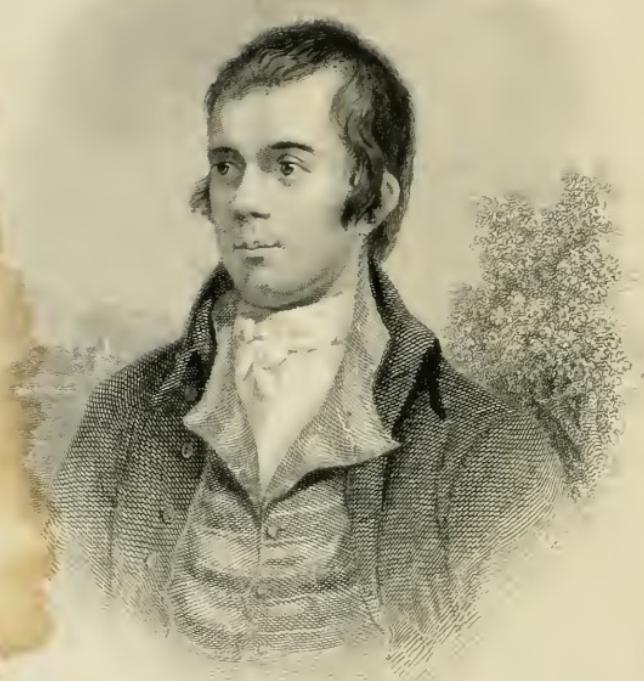


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THE
LIFE AND WORKS
OF
ROBERT BURNS

EDITED BY ROBERT CHAMBERS

Library Edition

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME I

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THE brilliant, painful history of ROBERT BURNS has been written by seven of his countrymen, some of them men of no mean distinction in literature. His productions have appeared in numberless editions. It will probably excite surprise that a new life of the poet, in connection with a new edition of his writings, should have been ventured upon. My belief is, that if such a step can be justified at all, justification can only be presented in a satisfactory form in the resulting work. I must hope that the reader, in perusing these volumes, will see in them peculiarities which will make them appear as not a superfluity. Meanwhile, I may be permitted to state briefly the views under which I was induced to enter upon the undertaking.

When Burns died, so many offended Conventionalities brooded and whispered over his grave, that his first biographer, Dr Currie—anxious to conciliate public favour and beneficence to the widow and family—entered upon his task in a timid spirit. He aimed at no detail of the poet's life; he was contented to do little more than arrange reports on the subject from the poet himself, his brother Gilbert, Professor Stewart, Mr Syme, and others, and to accompany the narrative with certain dissertations on those institutional influences which affect the character of the Scottish peasant. It would even appear that, in his anxiety to avoid provoking any loud demonstration from those who took unfavourable views of the life and conversation of Burns, he allowed himself—unwittingly, no doubt—to go somewhat beyond the strict truth in his concessions as to the imputed faults of the unfortunate Bard. In the other part of his task, the publication of the poetical and prose writings of Burns, Dr Currie does not seem to have thought any particular effort at arrangement or illustration necessary. He chiefly confined himself to the duty of a pure and tasteful selection. It appears from his own letters that he afterwards saw possibilities of improvement, but these he did not live

to accomplish. This amiable man—who had given the leisure of several years to a task by which fourteen hundred pounds were realised for the poet's family—looking for no reward to himself beyond the happiness of succouring the helpless—died at a too early age in 1805, perhaps in some degree the victim of his benevolent exertions.

Of the other biographies of the poet, two deserve particular notice. That by Mr Lockhart, which appeared in 1828, has been universally accepted as a graceful treatment of the subject: kind, without being partial, towards Burns, and informed with a fine spirit of criticism. It adds, however, little to the details previously known; and certainly any effort made by the author to attain correctness in the statement and arrangement of facts, was far from what would appear to have been necessary in the case. The subsequent biography by Allan Cunningham gives a greater amount of fresh anecdote, and has much of the charm which belongs to the well-known manner of the writer. Yet, whether from defective opportunities—he had never, I believe, set his foot in Ayrshire—or a failure to apprehend and grapple with the difficulties of the subject, he seems to have also failed to produce a work which could leave nothing to be desired. In the meantime, the poems and letters of Burns remained in their original unconnected and unillustrated state, with such additions to Dr Currie's list as had been obtained by successive editors, or as had been through any accident attributed to him. I had myself contributed to an edition a series of historical, biographical, and topographical notes, the preparation of which had been the amusement of some of my younger years; but having never had my suspicions properly awakened as to the labours of previous editors, I made no attempt at any further editorial duty. Subsequent editors have amply availed themselves of these notes, indeed to a degree which seems inconsistent with literary rights; but they have left the selection and arrangement of the poet's works as they found it. I should vainly, however, endeavour to convey an adequate idea of the confusion and inaccuracy which I now behold in the many editions of Burns, including, of course, that in which I had myself some concern. This can only be done by presenting in contrast one in which at length a faithfully zealous, however imperfect, attempt is made to put the writings of Burns before the world, not merely with fidelity as to text (here there is little room for amendment), but with a just regard to the time and circumstances under which they left his pen, and with a rigid exclusion of all which cannot be with tolerable certainty affiliated to him.

Venerating the generous editorship of Currie, admiring the writings of other men regarding the life and character of Burns, and duly sensible, I hope, of my deficiency in many of their qualifications, I have nevertheless been led by a love of the subject to venture on the task of producing a new and duly ample memoir of the Great Peasant. It appeared to me that Burns's still growing reputation justified some attempt of this kind, and that the time was passing, and would soon be past, when it could be successfully made. I have, accordingly, entered upon a minute examination of all the

materials which exist for a biography of the poet, and collected new and authentic particulars from all available sources, including the memory of his youngest sister, Mrs Begg, who still survives. The writings of Burns—his Poems, Songs, and Letters—are most of them so expressly the coinage of his immediate experiences and feelings, that his life might be read in them alone. As hitherto arranged, each series might be likened to a fragmentary view of the poet's life, supplementary to the meagre memoir usually prefixed. So arranged, the biographic effect of the whole is either imperfectly developed, or lost by dissipation. It occurred to me—and I find that the same idea had latterly occurred to Allan Cunningham—that if the various compositions were strung in strict chronological order upon the memoir, they might be made to render up the whole light which they are qualified to throw upon the history of the life and mental progress of Burns, at the same time that a new significance was given to them by their being read in connection with the current of events and emotions which led to their production. Such is the plan here adopted, and the result is not merely a great amount of new biographical detail, but a new sense, efficacy, and feeling, in the writings of the poet himself. It was not a task to be lightly accomplished. In ascertaining dates, in tracing the relations of writings to facts, and facts to writings, in checking mistakes not merely of biographers, but of the poet himself and his nearest relatives, and in verifying fresh information, a degree of labour has been encountered which seems surprising in regard to a poet who flourished only sixty years ago. It is only too probable that, in a subject found in so unfortunate a state, errors have not been avoided; but such as exist will, I hope, prove to be trivial; and I shall think little of my sacrifice of time in the case, if my countrymen shall join me in thinking that Burns deserved so much trouble being taken in recording the history of his life and writings.

As to the tone adopted regarding the *morale* of Burns, my wish has been, in a word, to write the truth with tenderness. To say that Burns was a man, is to say that he was not without infirmities. On this subject there has been much error on both sides, and the very prominence given to the subject has involved an injustice. I feel, for my own part, no hesitation in shewing Burns as the being of impulse and passion, subject, like other men, to occasional aberrations, which he actually was, but this in due subordination to the many admirable traits of character which shone in his life and writings. Regarding one whose brief life was one long hardship, relieved by little besides an ungainful excitement—who, during this singularly hapless career, did, on the whole, well maintain the grand battle of Will against Circumstances—who, strange to say, in the midst of his own poverty, conferred an inestimable and imperishable gift upon mankind—an Undying Voice for their finest sympathies—stamping at the same time more deeply the Divine doctrine of the fundamental equality of consideration due to all men—regarding such a one justice might perhaps be contented with less, but it could not well demand more. His writings involve much that one cannot but

think unhappily chosen in point of subject and allusion ; but, after all, who could wish even those which are most infelicitous in this respect unwritten ? I have not been rigorous in my selection of his writings—a few passages excepted—because I think that there is a disposition, both in the parties and descendants of persons whom certain of his poems once offended, to regard them as things having now only a literary interest, and to be judged of accordingly.

Such have been the views and principles under which the present work was prepared. It will be for the public to decide if such a task ought to have been undertaken, and if, its undertaking being justifiable, its execution has been befitting the subject.

1 DOUNE TERRACE,
EDINBURGH, November 25, 1850.

In presenting this reprint of the original popular edition, it seems only necessary to remark, that very little change of any kind has been made. I feel it to be an ample reward for many anxious efforts to carry historic accuracy into the minutest details of our Poet's life, that no error of any importance has been reported to me ; neither has any remarkable omission been supplied. Only a few new lights have arisen on comparatively trivial points, and these are here duly taken advantage of. I have now, accordingly, the satisfaction of thinking that the work is at length as near to perfect correctness in matter of fact, as the nature of the subject will permit it to be.

April 10, 1856.





** Italic letters indicate the publication devoted to his writings, in which, as far as ascertained, the various compositions of Burns were first included. The poems and songs marked *a* composed the first edition, published at Kilmarnock in 1786; those marked *b* were added in the second edition, published at Edinburgh in 1787; those marked *c* were added in the edition of 1793. These, with certain pieces which appeared in the early volumes of Johnson's Scots Musical Museum, and Thomson's Select Melodies of Scotland, were all that Burns himself committed to print; the rest, as well as his letters, have been published since his death. In this list of contents, the pieces published in Johnson's Museum are marked *d*; the poems and letters presented in Currie's first edition of the poet's works in 1800 are marked *e*; those added in the second edition, *f*; those published by Stewart of Glasgow in 1801, *g*; those in Cromeck's Reliques of Burns, 1808, *h*; those in Lockhart's Life of Burns, *i*; those in Cunningham's edition, 1834, *j*; those in Hogg and Motherwell's edition, 1834-6, *k*; those in the People's Edition of Messrs Chambers, 1838-40, *l*; those in Blackie's edition, 1846, *m*; those added in the present work, *n*; an asterisk being given in certain cases where it is ascertained that the poem or letter was previously sent forth fugitively.

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LIFE AND WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS

THE outlines of the life of Robert Burns are generally familiar. He was born on the 25th of January 1759, the eldest son of an Ayrshire peasant. He became a farmer on a small scale, and for some years held his own plough. He wrote poems chiefly in the Scottish vernacular tongue, and thus attracted the attention of his countrymen. Thereafter, he accepted the situation of a revenue-officer, and died at Dumfries on the 21st July 1796, in the thirty-eighth year of his age. His fame was great in his lifetime, and it quickly grew greater: for vivid thought and feeling, and for exquisite felicity of expression, it was seen that no contemporary productions approached his. Yet it was long before men could shake off an idea, derogatory in its general bearing, that Burns was only a wonderful peasant. Truer justice appears now to be done to him. It is beginning to be, if it is not now fully perceived, that he was one of the greatest of poetical spirits, without any regard to the accidental circumstances of birth and education—circumstances which may enhance his merits, but ought not to take from them.

ALLOWAY—MOUNT OLIPHANT.

1759—1777.

Burns, after he became known as a poet (August 1787), communicated an account of the previous twenty-eight years of his life to the novelist, Dr John Moore, who had become warmly interested in his behalf. The portion referring to his parentage, boyhood, and education, is as follows:—‘I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pie-coated guardians of escutcheons call a gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the Herald’s Office ; and looking through that granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom ; but for me,

“ My aneient but ignoble blood
Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood.”

Gules, Purpure, Argent, &c., quite disowned me.

‘My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large, where, after many years’ wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom. I have met with few who understood *men, their manners, and their ways*, equal to him ; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances ; consequently, I was born a very poor man’s son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a farmhouse ; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye till they could discern between good and evil ; so, with the assistance of his generous master, my father ventured on a small farm on his estate. At those years I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot piety. I say *idiot* piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar ; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my

infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery.¹ This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry, but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's, beginning, "How are thy servants blest, O Lord!" I particularly remember one stanza, which was music to my boyish ear :

"For though on dreadful whirls we hung
High on the broken wave."

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection*, one of my school-books. The two first books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were the *Life of Hannibal*, and the *History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest.

'Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half mad; and I, ambitious of shining in conversation-parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, &c., used, a few years afterwards, to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue-and-cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

'My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modification of spirited pride, was, like our Catechism definition of infinitude, *without bounds or limits*. I formed several connections with other younkers who possessed superior advantages—the *youngling* actors, who

¹ See postea a note regarding this female.

were busy in the rehearsal of parts in which they were shortly to appear on the stage of life, where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at this green age that our young gentry have a just sense of the immense distance between them and their ragged playfellows. It takes a few dashes into the world to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticed disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were perhaps born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the *clouterly* appearance of my ploughboy carcass, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inelemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books: among them, even then, I could pick up some observations; and one, whose heart I am sure not even the *Munny Begum* scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils.¹ My father's generous master died; the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clinch the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of "Twa Dogs." My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children; and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more; and to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly. I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me

¹ "My brother," says Gilbert Burns, "seems to set off his early companions in too consequential a manner. The principal acquaintance we had in Ayr, while boys, were four sons of Mr Andrew M'Culloch, a distant relation of my mother's, who kept a tea-shop, and had made a little money in the contraband trade, very common at that time. He died while the boys were young, and my father was nominated one of the tutors. The two eldest were bred shopkeepers; the third, a surgeon; and the youngest, the only surviving one, was bred in a counting-house in Glasgow, where he is now a respectable merchant. I believe all these boys went to the West Indies. Then there were two sons of Dr Malcolm, whom I have mentioned in my letter to Mrs Dunlop. The eldest, a very worthy young man, went to the East Indies, where he had a commission in the army; he is the person whose heart, my brother says, the *Munny Begum* scenes could not corrupt. The other, by the interest of Lady Wallace, got an ensigncy in a regiment raised by the Duke of Hamilton during the American war. I believe neither of them are now (1797) alive. We also knew the present Dr Paterson of Ayr, and a younger brother of his, now in Jamaica, who were much younger than us. I had almost forgot to mention Dr Charles of Ayr, who was a little older than my brother, and with whom we had a longer and closer intimacy than with any of the others, which did not, however, continue in after-life."

was a brother (Gilbert) who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

' This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave—brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language; but you know the Scottish idiom—she was a *bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass*. In short, she altogether, unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell: you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c., but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities she sang sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sang a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love, and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

' Thus with me began love and poetry, which at times have been my only, and, till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles further in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands

at the commencement of his lease ; otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here ; but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years' tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away to *where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.*

' It is during the time that we lived on this farm that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish—no *solaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from *Salmon's and Guthrie's Geographical Grammars* ; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature and criticism, I got from the *Spectator*. These, with *Pope's Works*, some plays of *Shakspeare*, *Tull and Dickson on Agriculture*, *The Pantheon*, *Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding*, *Stackhouse's History of the Bible*, *Justice's British Gardener's Directory*, *Bayle's Lectures*,¹ *Allan Ramsay's Works*, *Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, and *Hervey's Meditations*, had formed the whole of my reading.² The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse—carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian.³ I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic craft, such as it is.

' In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings, and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions ; from that instance of

¹ I can hear of no such book as *Bayle's Lectures*. It is probably a misprint of Currie (who makes many such mistakes) for a work specified in the article of appendix next referred to.

² See Appendix, 3.

³ According to the recollection of Mrs Begg, the poet's youngest sister, he first possessed a copy of the well-known *Tea-Table Miscellany* of Allan Ramsay—a collection of songs, including many by the worthy editor himself. At a later period, he obtained a collection of songs entitled *The Lark*. The first volume of the latter work is before us. Its title-page is as follows :—'*The Lark, being a Select Collection of the most Celebrated and Newest Songs, Scots and English*. Edinburgh, printed for W. Gordon, Bookseller in the Parliament Close. 1765.' It contains many of the best Scottish songs, and a few ballads, as *Gil Morris*, *The Babes in the Wood*, and *Hamilton's Braes of Yarrow*, but mixed up, it must be allowed, with a more than sufficient quantity of 'affectation and fustian.'

disobedience in me, he took a sort of dislike to me, which I believe was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years. I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of Presbyterian country life; for though the Will-o'-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterwards within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was—to want an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of fortune was the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture, I never could squeeze myself into it; the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly to solitude; add to these incentives to social life my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense, and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that always where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain*. My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and as in every other warfare in this world my fortune was various, sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared further for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity, that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I daresay I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Torbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe. The very goose-feather in my hand seems to know instinctively the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song, and is

with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the love adventures of my compeers, the humble inmates of the farmhouse and cottage; but the grave sons of science, ambition, or avarice, baptise these things by the name of follies. To the sons and daughters of labour and poverty, they are matters of the most serious nature; to them the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious parts of their enjoyments.'

William Burness (for so he spelt his name), the father of the poet, was a native of Kincardineshire. He had been reared on the estate of Dunnottar, which had been forfeited by the Keith Marischal family in 1716. Whether from this circumstance, or from some family tradition, the poet was fain to think that his immediate forefathers had been actively engaged in promoting the cause of the Stuarts. His brother Gilbert discountenanced the idea; but it is not certain that the poet was so much in error as his brother thought. Family misfortunes, we are told by Gilbert, compelled William Burness and a younger brother to leave the paternal mansion at an early age in search of employment and subsistence. 'I have often,' says Gilbert, 'heard my father describe the anguish of mind he felt when they parted on the top of a hill on the confines of their native place, each going off his several way in search of new adventures, and scarcely knowing whither he went. My father,' he adds, 'undertook to act as a gardener, and shaped his course to Edinburgh, where he wrought hard when he could get work,¹ passing through a variety of difficulties. Still, however, he endeavoured to spare something for the support of his aged parents; and I recollect hearing him mention his having sent a bank-note for this purpose, when money of that kind was so scarce in Kincardineshire that they scarcely knew how to employ it when it arrived.'²

It may be mentioned that an elder brother settled in Montrose, and attained such respectability as to be many years a town-councillor and elder in the church. His son, a legal practitioner in the same town, was grandfather of Sir Alexander Burnes, killed at Cabul in 1842.

William Burness at length migrated to Ayrshire, where he successively served the Laird of Fairlie and Mr Crawford of

¹ It is ascertained that the poet's father worked for some time at the formation of the walks of what is called Hope Park, a beautiful promenade adjacent to the southern suburbs of the Scottish capital. This was probably about 1749.

² See Appendix, No. 1.

Doonside as gardener. He then took a lease of seven acres of land near the Bridge of Doon, designing to carry on business as a nurseryman. He built on this ground a clay cottage with his own hands, and in December 1757 brought to it a young bride named Agnes Brown, the daughter of a Carrick farmer. In this humble dwelling their eldest child, the poet, saw the light thirteen months after.¹

Gilbert Burns related to Dr Currie a circumstance attending the birth of the poet. ‘When my father,’ he says, ‘built his clay bigging, he put in two stone jambs, as they are called, and a lintel, carrying up a chimney in his clay gable. The consequence was, that as the gable subsided, the jambs, remaining firm, threw it off its centre; and one very stormy morning, when my brother was nine or ten days old, a little before daylight, a part of the gable fell out, and the rest appeared so shattered, that my mother, with the young poet, had to be carried through the storm to a neighbour’s house, where they remained a week, till their own dwelling was adjusted.’ Gilbert adds—‘That you may not think too meanly of this house, or my father’s taste in building, by supposing the poet’s description in “The Vision” (which is entirely a fancy picture) applicable to it, allow me to take notice to you that the house consisted of a kitchen in one end and a room in the other, with a fireplace and chimney; that my father had constructed a concealed bed in the kitchen, with a small closet at the end, of the same materials with the house; and when altogether cast over, outside and in, with lime, it had a neat, comfortable appearance, such as no family of the same rank, in the present improved style of living, would think themselves ill lodged in.’

William Burness, himself a man of uncommon intelligence for his station in life, was anxious that his children should have the best education which their circumstances admitted of. Robert was therefore sent in his sixth year to a little school at Alloway Mill, about a mile from their cottage: not long after, his father took a lead in establishing a young teacher, named John Murdoch, in

¹ The entry of the poet’s birth in the session-books of Ayr parish is as follows:—‘Robert Burns, lawful son of William Burns in Alloway, and Agnes Brown his spouse, was born January 25th, 1759: baptised by Mr William Dalrymple. Witnesses, John Tennant and James Young.’ It is remarkable that the name is here spelt in the manner afterwards assumed by the poet. The explanation is, that the name was already established in Ayrshire, and usually spelt in this manner. Mr Dalrymple survived to know Burns as a poet, and to be a subject of panegyric in his verses.

a humble temple of learning nearer hand, and there Robert and his younger brother Gilbert attended for some time. It will have been observed that the poet, in his own narrative, passes over his school attendance with slight notice, in comparison with the legendary lore he derived from the old woman who resided in the family.¹ Gilbert has been more exact on that subject. Referring to Murdoch, in a letter addressed to Dr Currie, he says: ‘With him we learned to read English tolerably well, and to write a little. He taught us, too, the English grammar. I was too young to profit much from his lessons in grammar, but Robert made some proficiency in it; a circumstance of considerable weight in the unfolding of his genius and character, as he soon became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression, and read the few books that came in his way with much pleasure and improvement; for even then he was a reader when he could get a book. Murdoch, whose library at that time had no great variety in it, lent him the *Life of Hannibal*, which was the first book he read (the school-books excepted), and almost the only one he had an opportunity of reading while he was at school; for the *Life of Wallace*, which he classes with it in one of his letters to you, he did not see for some years afterwards, when he borrowed it from the blacksmith who shod our horses.’

The poet was seven years of age when (1766) his father left the *clay bigging* at Alloway, and settled in the small upland farm of Mount Oliphant, about a couple of miles distant. He and his younger brother, nevertheless, continued to attend Mr Murdoch’s school for two years longer, when the little seminary was broken

¹ Mrs Begg states that the old woman, whose legendary lore made so deep an impression on the poet’s infant mind, was named Betty Davidson. She was the widow of a cousin of Mrs Burness, and mainly dependent on a son whose wife was not very kind to her. For this reason, William Burness used to invite the poor old woman to spend a few months at a time with his family, both at Alloway and Mount Oliphant, where, to requite his kindness, she was most assiduous in spinning, carding, and doing all kinds of good offices that were in her power. She was of a mirthful temperament, and therefore a great favourite with the children. Mrs Begg remembers the particular impression made upon them by a string of uncommonly large amber (*Scottice, lammer*) beads which she wore round her neck. In the latter days of this legendary oracle, William Burness, finding her neglected by her daughter-in-law, hired at his own expense a woman to attend to her.

‘His means was little to his ampler heart.’

Long after Betty’s death, when Dr Currie had conferred such a distinguished favour upon the poet’s family and friends, it was proposed by Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop to recover Betty Davidson’s wonderful string of lammer-beads, and offer them as a gift to Mrs Currie. They were not to be found; but as a suceedaneum, a number of uncommonly large amber-beads were obtained from other sources, and formed into one string for this purpose.

up, in consequence of its master obtaining a superior situation elsewhere. Gilbert remembered a circumstance occurring at this time, which he thought illustrative of his brother's character: 'Murdoch came to spend a night with us, and to take his leave when he was about to go into Carrick. He brought us, as a present and memorial of him, a small compendium of English Grammar, and the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, and by way of passing the evening, he began to read the play aloud. We were all attention for some time, till presently the whole party was dissolved in tears. A female in the play (I have but a confused remembrance of it) had her hands chopped off, and her tongue cut out, and then was insultingly desired to call for water to wash her hands. At this, in an agony of distress, we with one voice desired he would read no more. My father observed, that if we would not hear it out, it would be needless to leave the play with us. Robert replied, that if it were left he would burn it. My father was going to chide him for this ungrateful return to his tutor's kindness; but Murdoch interfered, declaring that he liked to see so much sensibility; and he left the *School for Love*, a comedy, translated, I think, from the French, in its place.'

William Burness from this time took upon himself the duty of instructing his two sons and other children. 'Nothing,' continues Gilbert, 'could be more retired than our general manner of living at Mount Oliphant; we rarely saw anybody but the members of our own family. There were no boys of our own age or near it in the neighbourhood. Indeed the greatest part of the land in the vicinity was at that time possessed by shopkeepers, and people of that stamp, who had retired from business, or who kept their farm in the country, at the same time that they followed business in town. My father was for some time almost the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men; and was at great pains, as we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge, or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed Salmon's *Geographical Grammar* for us, and endeavoured to make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world; while from a book-society in Ayr he procured for us the reading of Derham's *Physico and Astro-Theology*, and Ray's *Wisdom of God in the Creation*, to give us some idea of astronomy and natural history. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled. My father had been a subscriber

to Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, then lately published by James Meuros in Kilmarnock: from this Robert collected a competent knowledge of ancient history; for no book was so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches. A brother of my mother, who had lived with us some time, and had learnt some arithmetic by our winter evening's candle, went into a bookseller's shop in Ayr to purchase the *Ready Reckoner, or Tradesman's Sure Guide*, and a book to teach him to write letters. Luckily, in place of the *Complete Letter Writer*, he got by mistake a small collection of letters by the most eminent writers, with a few sensible directions for attaining an easy epistolary style. This book was to Robert of the greatest consequence. It inspired him with a strong desire to excel in letter-writing, while it furnished him with models by some of the first writers in our language.

' My brother was about thirteen or fourteen when my father, regretting that we wrote so ill, sent us, week about, during a summer quarter, to the parish school of Dalrymple, which, though between two and three miles distant, was the nearest to us, that we might have an opportunity of remedying this defect. About this time a bookish acquaintance of my father's procured us a reading of two volumes of Richardson's *Pamela*, which was the first novel we read, and the only part of Richardson's works my brother was acquainted with, till towards the period of his commencing author. Till that time, too, he remained unacquainted with Fielding, with Smollett (two volumes of *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, and two volumes of *Peregrine Pickle*, excepted), with Hume, with Robertson, and almost all our authors of eminence of the later times. I recollect, indeed, my father borrowed a volume of English history from Mr Hamilton of Bourtreehill's gardener. It treated of the reign of James I. and his unfortunate son Charles, but I do not know who was the author; all that I remember of it is something of Charles's conversation with his children. About this time, Murdoch, our former teacher, after having been in different places in the country, and having taught a school some time in Dumfries, came to be the established teacher of the English language in Ayr, a circumstance of considerable consequence to us. The remembrance of my father's former friendship, and his attachment to my brother, made him do everything in his power for our improvement. He sent us *Pope's Works*, and some other poetry, the first that we had an opportunity of reading, excepting what is contained in the English Collection,

and in the volume of the *Edinburgh Magazine* for 1772; excepting also those excellent new songs that are hawked about the country in baskets, or exposed on stalls in the streets.

'The summer after we had been at Dalrymple School, my father sent Robert to Ayr, to revise his English grammar with his former teacher. He had been there only one week, when he was obliged to return to assist at the harvest. When the harvest was over, he went back to school, where he remained two weeks; and this completes the account of his school education, excepting one summer quarter, some time afterwards, that he attended the parish school of Kirkoswald (where he lived with a brother of my mother's) to learn surveying.

'During the two last weeks that he was with Murdoch, he himself was engaged in learning French,¹ and he communicated the instructions he received to my brother, who, when he returned, brought home with him a French dictionary and grammar, and the *Adventures of Telemachus* in the original. In a little while, by the assistance of these books, he had acquired such a knowledge of the language, as to read and understand any French author in prose. This was considered as a sort of prodigy, and, through the medium of Murdoch, procured him the acquaintance of several lads in Ayr, who were at that time gabbling French, and the notice of some families, particularly that of Dr Malcolm, where a knowledge of French was a recommendation.

'Observing the facility with which he had acquired the French language, Mr Robinson, the established writing-master in Ayr, and Mr Murdoch's particular friend, having himself acquired a considerable knowledge of the Latin language by his own industry,

¹ Mr Tennant of Ayr, in 1838 one of the few surviving early friends of Burns, had the following recollections respecting him:—'He first knew the poet when attending Mr Murdoch's school at Ayr, he being then fifteen, and Burns a year and a half older. Burns and he were favourite pupils of Murdoch, who used to take them alternately to live with him, allowing them a share of his bed. Mr Murdoch was a well-informed and zealous teacher—a particularly good French scholar, insomuch that he at one time taught the language in France. He thought his voice had some peculiar quality or power, adapting it in an uncommon degree for French pronunciation. Murdoch was so anxious to advance his two favourite pupils, that, while they were lying with him, he was always taking opportunities of communicating knowledge. The intellectual gifts of Burns, even at this time, greatly impressed his fellow-scholar. Robert and Gilbert Burns were like no other young men. Their style of language was quite above that of their conpeers. Robert had borrowed great numbers of books, and acquainted himself with their contents. He read rapidly, but remembered all that was interesting or valuable in what he read. He had the New Testament more at command than any other youth ever known to Mr Tennant, who was altogether more impressed in these his boyish days by the discourse of the youthful poet, than he afterwards was by his published verses.'

without ever having learnt it at school, advised Robert to make the same attempt, promising him every assistance in his power. Agreeably to this advice, he purchased the *Rudiments of the Latin Tongue*, but finding this study dry and uninteresting, it was quickly laid aside. He frequently returned to his Rudiments on any little chagrin or disappointment, particularly in his love affairs; but the Latin seldom predominated more than a day or two at a time, or a week at most. Observing himself the ridicule that would attach to this sort of conduct if it were known, he made two or three humorous stanzas on the subject, which I cannot now recollect; but they all ended,

“ So I'll to my Latin again.”

‘ Thus you see Mr Murdoch was a principal means of my brother's improvement. Worthy man! though foreign to my present purpose, I cannot take leave of him without tracing his future history. He continued for some years a respected and useful teacher at Ayr, till one evening that he had been overtaken in liquor, he happened to speak somewhat disrespectfully of Dr Dalrymple, the parish minister, who had not paid him that attention to which he thought himself entitled. In Ayr he might as well have spoken blasphemy. He found it proper to give up his appointment. He went to London, where he still lives (1797), a private teacher of French.¹

‘ The father of Dr Paterson, now physician at Ayr, was, I believe, a native of Aberdeenshire, and was one of the established teachers in Ayr when my father settled in the neighbourhood. He early recognised my father as a fellow-native of the north of Scotland, and a certain degree of intimacy subsisted between them during Mr Paterson's life. After his death, his widow, who is a very genteel woman, and of great worth, delighted in doing what she thought her husband would have wished to have done, and assiduously kept up her attentions to all his acquaintance. She kept alive the intimacy with our family, by frequently inviting my

¹ Mr John Murdoch died April 20, 1824, aged seventy-seven. He had published a *Radical Vocabulary of the French Language*, 12mo, 1783; *Pronunciation and Orthography of the French Language*, 8vo, 1788; *Dictionary of Distinctions*, 8vo, 1811; and other works. He was a highly amiable and worthy man. In his latter days, illness had reduced him to the brink of destitution, and an appeal was made to the friends and admirers of his illustrious pupil in his behalf. Some money was thus raised, and applied to the relief of his necessities. It is stated in the obituary notice of Mr Murdoch, published in the Loudon papers, that he had taught English in London to several distinguished foreigners; among the rest, to the celebrated Talleyrand, during his residence as an emigrant in England.

father and mother to her house on Sundays, when she met them at church.

'When she came to know my brother's passion for books, she kindly offered us the use of her husband's library, and from her we got the *Spectator*, *Pope's Translation of Homer*, and several other books that were of use to us. Mount Oliphant, the farm my father possessed in the parish of Ayr, is almost the very poorest soil I know of in a state of cultivation. A stronger proof of this I cannot give than that, notwithstanding the extraordinary rise in the value of lands in Scotland, it was, after a considerable sum laid out in improving it by the proprietor, let a few years ago five pounds per annum lower than the rent paid for it by my father thirty years ago. My father, in consequence of this, soon came into difficulties, which were increased by the loss of several of his cattle by accidents and disease. To the buffettings of misfortune we could only oppose hard labour, and the most rigid economy. We lived very sparingly. For several years butcher's meat was a stranger in the house, while all the members of the family exerted themselves to the utmost of their strength, and rather beyond it, in the labours of the farm. My brother, at the age of thirteen, assisted in thrashing the crop of corn, and at fifteen was the principal labourer on the farm, for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind we felt at our tender years under these straits and difficulties was very great. To think of our father growing old (for he was now above fifty), broken down with the long-continued fatigues of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances; these reflections produced in my brother's mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress. I doubt not but the hard labour and sorrow of this period of his life was in a great measure the cause of that depression of spirits with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards. At this time he was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull headache, which, at a future period of his life, was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed in the night-time.'

The reader will have caught from these narrations some notion of the domestic scene and characters amongst which the poet was brought up. Their superiority to ordinary cottage-life in most countries, must have been cordially acknowledged. The father, however, has not yet been fully depicted. Dr Currie says: 'The father of our poet is described by one who knew him towards

the latter end of his life as above the common stature, thin, and bent with labour. His countenance was serious and expressive, and the scanty locks on his head were gray. He was of a religious turn of mind, and, as is usual among the Scottish peasantry, a good deal conversant in speculative theology. There is in Gilbert's hands a little manual of religious belief, in the form of a dialogue between a father and his son, composed by him for the use of his children, in which the benevolence of his heart seems to have led him to soften the rigid Calvinism of the Scottish Church into something approaching to Arminianism. He was a devout man, and in the practice of calling his family together to join in prayer. It is known that the following exquisite picture in the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, represents William Burness and his family at their evening devotions:—

"The cheerful supper done, with serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide ; fire
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big *hall*-Bible, once his father's pride :
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare ; gray temples
Those strains that once did sweet in Sion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care ; chooses
And 'Let us worship God !' he says with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise ;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim :
Perhaps *Dundee's*¹ wild warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive *Martyrs*,¹ worthy of the name ;
Or noble *Elgin*¹ beats the heavenly flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays ;
Compared with these, Italian trills are tame ;
The tickled ears no heartfelt raptures raise ;
No unison have they with our Creator's praise.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,²
How Abram was the friend of God on high;
Or Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;

¹ Names of tunes in Scottish psalmody. The tunes mentioned in this poem are the three which were used by William Burness, who had no greater variety.

² The course of family devotion among the people of Scotland is—first to sing a psalm; then to read a portion of Scripture; and, lastly, to kneel down in prayer.

Or how the royal bard did groaning lie,
 Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire ;
 Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry ;
 Or rapt Isaiah's wild seraphic fire ;
 Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,
 How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed ;
 How He, who bore in heaven the second name,
 Had not on earth whereon to lay his head ;
 How his first followers and servants sped ;
 The precepts sage they wrote to many a land ;
 How he, who lone in Patmos banishèd,
 Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,
 And heard great Babylon's doom pronounced, by Heaven's
 command !

Then kneeling down, to heaven's eternal King,
 The saint, the father, and the husband, prays ;
 'Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing,'
 That thus they all shall meet in future days ;
 There ever bask in uncreated rays,
 No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
 Together hymning their Creator's praise,
 In such society, yet still more dear ;
 While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere.

* * * *

Then homeward all take off their several way ;
 The youngling cottagers retire to rest :
 The parent pair their secret homage pay,
 And offer up to Heaven the warm request :
 That He who stills the raven's clam'rous nest,
 And decks the lily fair in flowery pride,
 Would, in the way His wisdom sees the best,
 For them and for their little ones provide ;
 But, chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside !'

Mr Murdoch has given some further description of the worthy man and his household, first mentioning a fact in itself most remarkable as regarding William Burness, that he and four of his neighbours engaged this young teacher to instruct their children, on the understanding that he was to be boarded amongst them, besides receiving a small salary. He says: 'My pupil, Robert Burns, was then between six and seven years of age; his preceptor, about eighteen. Robert, and his younger brother, Gilbert, had

been grounded a little in English before they were put under my care. They both made a rapid progress in reading, and a tolerable progress in writing. In reading, dividing words into syllables by rule, spelling without book, parsing sentences, &c., Robert and Gilbert were generally at the upper end of the class, even when ranged with boys by far their seniors. The books most commonly used in the school were the *Spelling-Book*, the *New Testament*, the *Bible*, Mason's *Collection of Prose and Verse*, and Fisher's *English Grammar*. They committed to memory the hymns and other poems of that collection with uncommon facility. This facility was partly owing to the method pursued by their father and me in instructing them, which was, to make them thoroughly acquainted with the meaning of every word in each sentence that was to be committed to memory. By the by, this may be easier done, and at an earlier period, than is generally thought. As soon as they were capable of it, I taught them to turn verse into its natural prose order; sometimes to substitute synonymous expressions for poetical words, and to supply all the ellipses. These, you know, are the means of knowing that the pupil understands his author. These are excellent helps to the arrangement of words in sentences, as well as to a variety of expression.¹

'Gilbert always appeared to me to possess a more lively imagination, and to be more of the wit, than Robert. I attempted to teach them a little church-music. Here they were left far behind by all the rest of the school. Robert's ear, in particular, was remarkably dull, and his voice untunable. It was long before I could get them to distinguish one tune from another. Robert's countenance was generally grave, and expressive of a serious, contemplative, and thoughtful mind. Gilbert's face said, *Mirth, with thee I mean to live*; and certainly, if any person who knew the two boys had been asked which of them was the most likely to court the Muses, he would surely never have guessed that Robert had a propensity of that kind.

'In the year 1767 [1766], Mr Burness quitted his mud edifice, and took possession of a farm—Mount Oliphant—of his own improving, while in the service of Provost Ferguson. This farm being at a considerable distance from the school, the boys could not attend regularly; and some changes taking place among the

¹ It will here be observed that Burns possessed the accidental, but great advantage, of acquiring his learning under a master who had anticipated several of the chief improvements which have since been introduced into tuition.

other supporters of the school, I left it, having continued to conduct it for nearly two years and a half.

' In the year 1772 I was appointed—being one of five candidates who were examined—to teach the English school at Ayr; and in 1773, Robert Burns came to board and lodge with me, for the purpose of revising English grammar, &c., that he might be better qualified to instruct his brothers and sisters at home. He was now with me day and night, in school, at all meals, and in all my walks. At the end of one week, I told him, that as he was now pretty much master of the parts of speech, &c., I should like to teach him something of French pronunciation; that when he should meet with the name of a French town, ship, officer, or the like, in the newspapers, he might be able to pronounce it something like a French word. Robert was glad to hear this proposal, and immediately we attacked the French with great courage.

' Now, there was little else to be heard but the declension of nouns, the conjugation of verbs, &c. When walking together, and even at meals, I was constantly telling him the names of different objects, as they presented themselves, in French; so that he was hourly laying in a stock of words, and sometimes little phrases. In short, he took such pleasure in learning, and I in teaching, that it was difficult to say which of the two was most zealous in the business; and about the end of the second week of our study of the French, we began to read a little of the *Adventures of Telemachus* in Fénélon's own words.

' But now the plains of Mount Oliphant began to whiten, and Robert was summoned to relinquish the pleasing scenes that surrounded the grotto of Calypso, and, armed with a sickle, to seek glory by signalising himself in the fields of Ceres; and so he did, for although but about fifteen, I was told that he performed the work of a man.

' Thus was I deprived of my very apt pupil, and, consequently, agreeable companion, at the end of three weeks, one of which was spent entirely in the study of English, and the other two, chiefly in that of French. I did not, however, lose sight of him, but was a frequent visitant at his father's house, when I had my half-holiday; and very often went, accompanied with one or two persons more intelligent than myself, that good William Burness might enjoy a mental feast. Then the labouring oar was shifted to some other hand. The father and the son sat down with us, when we enjoyed a conversation, wherein solid reasoning, sensible remark, and a moderate seasoning of jocularity, were so nicely

blended, as to render it palatable to all parties. Robert had a hundred questions to ask me about the French, &c.; and the father, who had always rational information in view, had still some question to propose to my more learned friends, upon moral or natural philosophy, or some such interesting subject. Mrs Burness, too, was of the party as much as possible :

“ But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
Which ever as she could with haste despatch,
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up their discourse”——

and particularly that of her husband. At all times, and in all companies, she listened to him with a more marked attention than to anybody else. When under the necessity of being absent while he was speaking, she seemed to regret, as a real loss, that she had missed what the good man had said. This worthy woman, Agnes Brown, had the most thorough esteem for her husband of any woman I ever knew. I can by no means wonder that she highly esteemed him ; for I myself have always considered William Burness as by far the best of the human race that ever I had the pleasure of being acquainted with—and many a worthy character I have known. I can cheerfully join with Robert in the last line of his epitaph (borrowed from Goldsmith),

“ And even his failings leaned to virtue's side.”

He was an excellent husband, if I may judge from his assiduous attention to the ease and comfort of his worthy partner, and from her affectionate behaviour to him, as well as her unwearied attention to the duties of a mother.

‘ He was a tender and affectionate father ; he took pleasure in leading his children in the path of virtue ; not in driving them, as some parents do, to the performance of duties to which they themselves are averse. He took care to find fault but very seldom ; and, therefore, when he did rebuke, he was listened to with a kind of reverential awe. A look of disapprobation was felt ; a reproof was severely so ; and a stripe with the *tawz*, even on the skirt of the coat, gave heartfelt pain, produced a loud lamentation, and brought forth a flood of tears.

‘ He had the art of gaining the esteem and good-will of those that were labourers under him. I think I never saw him angry but twice : the one time it was with the foreman of the band for not reaping the field as he was desired ; and the other time it was

with an old man for using smutty innuendoes and *double entendres*. Were every foul-mouthed old man to receive a seasonable check in this way, it would be to the advantage of the rising generation. As he was at no time overbearing to inferiors, he was equally incapable of that passive, pitiful, paltry spirit, that induces some people to *keep booing and boozing* in the presence of a great man. He always treated superiors with a becoming respect; but he never gave the smallest encouragement to aristocratical arrogance. But I must not pretend to give you a description of all the manly qualities, the rational and Christian virtues, of the venerable William Burness. Time would fail me. I shall only add, that he carefully practised every known duty, and avoided everything that was criminal; or, in the Apostle's words, *Herein did he exercise himself, in living a life void of offence towards God and towards men*. O for a world of men of such dispositions! We should then have no wars. I have often wished, for the good of mankind, that it were as customary to honour and perpetuate the memory of those who excel in moral rectitude, as it is to extol what are called heroic actions: then would the mausoleum of the friend of my youth overtop and surpass most of the monuments I see in Westminster Abbey.

'Although I cannot do justice to the character of this worthy man, yet you will perceive, from these few particulars, what kind of person had the principal hand in the education of our poet. He spoke the English language with more propriety—both with respect to diction and pronunciation—than any man I ever knew with no greater advantages. This had a very good effect on the boys, who began to talk and reason like men, much sooner than their neighbours.'

We see in these narratives, that Robert Burns was the child of poverty and toil, but that there were fortunate circumstances in his position. The first of these was his having parents of such singular excellence, and particularly his having for a father one who was a perfect model of humble intelligence and worth. The mother of Burns is described as having been an excellent specimen of the prudent cottage matrons of Scotland—calm in her demeanour, careful of her household, conscientious in discharging the duty she owed to her children, and full of veneration for her husband. She had, however, no pretensions to superior intellect, or to any education above that of her compeers.¹ Those who are so gallant

¹ See Appendix, No. 2.

to the gentler sex as to believe that extraordinary talents are *always* inherited through the mother, have here an instance against their theory, for, beyond doubt, those of Burns were derived, along with a keenly nervous temperament, from his father. In all that has been recorded of this person, we can see the traits of one of Nature's gentlemen. Under an exterior which extreme reserve rendered somewhat repulsive, the elder Burns carried an intelligent mind and genial affections. Thrown amongst people beneath him in intellect, he seems to have withdrawn into himself, and hence it was that to an observer of a different rank he seemed chill and austere, if not dull. But, as one of his son's biographers has observed, 'when he found a companion to his taste, with whom he could make a fair exchange of mind, he seemed to grow into a different being, or into one suddenly restored to his native element.'¹ In this respect it will be found that his son was exactly his second self. William Burness had taken upon himself the cares of a farm, hazarding the troubles arising in that mode of life from want of capital, that he might have occupation for his children at home, instead of sending them forth to take their chance of demoralisation amongst strangers. He exerted himself as their instructor, and, cottager as he was, contrived to have something like the benefits of private tuition for his two eldest sons. The mind which dictated such sacrifices for a high principle, could not be one of a common mould. And here it was that we find the second of the fortunate circumstances of Burns. By the father's model of life, and the teaching which his liberality secured, the young poet became, comparatively speaking, a well-educated man; for so undoubtedly may he be considered who has been trained by precept and example as a moral being, and taught the use of at least the golden keys which unlock the stores of knowledge. In Scotland, it may be remarked, such self-sacrifice on the part of parents for their children is the rule, and not the exception. Indeed, it forms one of those glories of the Scottish character of past primitive days, which it may be difficult to replace by anything of equal value in the different state of society which seems approaching. Yet even in Scotland the exertions of William Burness for the education of his two boys are of so extraordinary a character, that one is tempted to surmise some motive beyond what appears. Such may perhaps be found in the sense which we now learn William Burness possessed of the character of his children. He

¹ Walker's *Life of Burns*.

had remarked, we are told,¹ from a very early period, the bright intellect of his elder born in particular, saying to his wife: ‘Whoever may live to see it, something extraordinary will come from that boy!’ It is affecting to think of the difficulties and privations which this paragon of cottage sires encountered for the sake of his offspring, and to reflect that by their consequences he was made an old man before his time, and brought down in sorrow to the grave. Of such metal, however, were the peasantry of Scotland in those old days which never can return.

In other circumstances, the lot of Burns was a hard one. He fully shared in the hardships incurred by his father for the sake of his children. While still a boy in years—from thirteen to fifteen—he was called upon, by stern necessity, to do, if possible, the work of a man. He undertook and performed this duty; but high motive will not procure an exemption from physical evil. By hard labour, thus prematurely undergone, without the support of a sufficient diet, his naturally robust frame was severely injured. Externally, the consequences appeared in a stoop of the shoulders, which never left him; but internally, in the more serious form of mental depression, attended by a nervous disorder, which affected the movements of the heart. The unsocial life which a high-principled economy dictated in his father’s household at Mount Oliphant, further rendered him, by his own acknowledgment, a rude and clownish *solitaire*. He admits that he was not at that time a popular character. Under ‘the cheerless gloom of a hermit, and the unceasing moil of a galley-slave’—as yet unsoftened by the gentler passions—it was not likely that he should shine forth as a favourite. The first touch of an emotion which afterwards gushed upon him, was experienced in his seventeenth autumn on the harvest-field, the cause being that ‘bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass,’ a year younger than himself, who had been assigned to him as the partner of his labours; Nelly Kilpatrick by name, and the daughter of the same blacksmith, it appears, who lent him his first book, the *Life of Wallace*.² This simple girl sang a song which had been composed by a neighbouring country lad, and Burns thought he might be able to compose a song too. He, therefore, made one upon the charms of his handsome Nell—‘very puerile and silly,’ he afterwards confessed, and the honest reader will scarcely reverse the judgment—but then, he adds: ‘I composed it in a wild

¹ Such is the report of the sister of the poet, Mrs Begg.

² From the recollection of Mrs Begg.

enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies at the remembrance.' It was as follows :—

HANDSOME NELL.

TUNE—*I am a Man Unmarried.*

Oh once I loved a bonnie lass,
Ay, and I love her still ;
And whilst that honour warms my breast,
I'll love my handsome Nell.

As bonnie lasses I ha'e seen,
And mony full as braw ;
But for a modest, gracefu' mien,
The like I never saw.

A bonnie lass, I will confess,
Is pleasant to the ee,
But without some better qualities,
She's no the lass for me.

But Nelly's looks are blithe and sweet,
And, what is best of a',
Her reputation is complete,
And fair without a flaw.¹

She dresses aye sae clean and neat,
Both decent and genteel :
And then there's something in her gait
Gars ony dress look weel.

A gaudy dress and gentle air
May slightly touch the heart ;
But it's innocence and modesty
That polishes the dart.

'Tis this in Nelly pleases me,
'Tis this enchant's my soul ;
For absolutely in my breast
She reigns without control.

¹ Variation in Mr John Dick's MS. :—

But Nelly's looks are blithe and sweet,
Good-humoured, frank, and free ;
And still the more I view them o'er,
The more they captive me.

The next verse is wanting in that MS.

L O C H L E A.

1777—1784.

William Burness lingered out twelve years in the ungenial glebe of Mount Oliphant, and at Whitsunday 1777, removed to a somewhat more promising farm called Lochlea—pronounced Lochly—in the parish of Torbolton. The country is here composed of an undulating upland, rising from the right or north bank of the river Ayr, generally from three to five hundred feet above the level of the sea, and of bare and unattractive aspect. The views, however, which are obtained from some of the braes, are at once extensive and beautiful, comprehending the hills of Carrick in front, and the Firth of Clyde, with its romantic islands, on the right hand. The farm seems to have obtained its name from a small lake in its neighbourhood, one of a number of such pieces of water which once interspersed this district of Ayrshire, but are now for the most part drained, or reduced to marshes. William Burness took this farm of 130 acres at twenty shillings an acre, which seems a high rent for ground so situated seventy years ago.

For some time the life of the family seems to have been more tolerable at Lochlea than it had been at any previous period, probably in the main because the young people were now able to render their parents such assistance as to save them some outlay for labour. They all worked to the extent of their ability, and none more heartily or efficiently than the poet. It was at this time, according to the recollection of his sister, that he went for a short time to learn dancing. Now also occurred a short episode in his life, of which he has given a brief account in his letter to Dr Moore:—

‘ Another circumstance in my life which made some alteration in my mind and manners was, that I spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were till this time new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a

high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming *fillette*, who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the sphere of my studies. I, however, struggled on with my *sines* and *co-sines* for a few days more; but stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, therc I met my angel,

“ Like Proserpine, gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower ”—

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I stayed, I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.’

The scene of this adventure was Kirkoswald, in Carrick. If the poet be right in speaking of his nineteenth summer, the date must have been 1777. What seems to have suggested his going to Kirkoswald school, was the connection of his mother with that parish. She was the daughter of Gilbert Brown, farmer of Craigenton, in this parochial division of Carrick, in which she had many friends still living, particularly a brother, Samuel Brown, who resided, in the miscellaneous capacity of farm-labourer, fisherman, and dealer in wool, at the farmhouse of Ballochneil, above a mile from the village of Kirkoswald. Samuel, though not the farmer or guidman of the place, was a person held to be in creditable circumstances in a district where the distinction between master and servant was, and still is, by no means great. His wife was the sister of Niven, the tenant; and he lived in the ‘chamber’ or better portion of the farmhouse, but was now a widower. It was with Brown that Burns lived during his attendance at Kirkoswald School, walking every morning to the village where the little seminary of learning was situated, and returning at night.

The district into which the young poet of Kyle was thus thrown has many features of a remarkable kind. Though situated on the shore of the Firth of Clyde, where steamers are every hour to be seen on their passage between enlightened and busy cities, it is to this day the seat of simple and patriarchal usages. Its land, composed of bleak green uplands, partly cultivated, and partly pastoral, was, at the time alluded to, occupied by a generation of primitive small farmers, many of whom, while preserving their native simplicity, had superadded to it some of the irregular habits

arising from a concern in the trade of introducing contraband goods on the Carrick coast.¹ Such dealings did not prevent superstition from flourishing amongst them in a degree of vigour of which no district of Lowland Scotland now presents any example. The parish has six miles of sea-coast; and the village, where the church and school are situated, is in a sheltered situation about a couple of miles inland.

The parish schoolmaster, Hugh Rodger, enjoyed great local fame as a teacher of mensuration and geometry, and was much employed as a practical land-surveyor. On the day when Burns entered at the school, another youth, a little younger than himself, also entered. This was a native of the neighbouring town of Maybole, who, having there completed a course of classical study, was now sent by his father, a respectable shopkeeper, to acquire arithmetic and mensuration under the famed mathematician of Kirkoswald. It was then the custom, when pupils of their age entered at a school, to take the master to a tavern, and sweeten the engagement by treating him to some liquor. Burns and the Maybole youth, accordingly, united to regale Rodger with a potation of ale at a public-house in the village, kept by two gentlewomanly sort of persons named Kennedy—Jean and Anne Kennedy—the former of whom was destined to be afterwards married to immortal verse, under the appellation of *Kirkton Jean*, and whose house, in consideration of some pretensions to birth or style above the common, was always called ‘The Ladies’ House.’ From that time, Burns and the Maybole youth became intimate friends; insomuch that, during this summer, neither had any companion with whom he was more frequently in company than with the other. Burns was only at the village during school-hours; but when his friend Willie returned to the paternal dome on Saturday nights, the poet would accompany him, and stay till it was time for both to come back to school on Monday morning. There was also an interval between the morning and afternoon meetings of the school, which the two youths used to spend together. Instead of amusing themselves with ball or any other sport, like the rest of the scholars, they would take a walk by themselves in the outskirts of the village, and converse on subjects calculated to

¹ ‘This business was first carried on here from the Isle of Man, and afterwards to a considerable extent from France, Ostend, and Gottenburg. Persons engaged in it found it necessary to go abroad, and enter into business with foreign merchants; and by dealing in tea, spirits, and silks, brought home to their families and friends the means of luxury and finery at the cheapest rate.’—*Statistical Account of Kirkoswald*, 1794.

improve their minds. By and by they fell upon a plan of holding disputationes or arguments on speculative questions, one taking one side, and the other the other, without much regard to their respective opinions on the point, whatever it might be, the whole object being to sharpen their intellects. They asked several of their companions to come and take a side in these debates, but not one would do so; they only laughed at the young philosophers. The matter at length reached the ears of the master, who, however skilled in mathematics, possessed but a narrow understanding and little general knowledge. With all the bigotry of the old school, he conceived that this supererogatory employment of his pupils was a piece of absurdity, and he resolved to correct them in it. One day, therefore, when the school was fully met, and in the midst of its usual business, he went up to the desk where Burns and Willie were sitting opposite to each other, and began to advert in sarcastic terms to what he had heard of them. They had become great debaters, he understood, and conceived themselves fit to settle affairs of importance, which wiser heads usually let alone. He hoped their disputationes would not ultimately become quarrels, and that they would never think of coming from words to blows; and so forth. The jokes of schoolmasters always succeed amongst the boys, who are too glad to find the awful man in anything like good-humour, to question either the moral aim or the point of his wit. They therefore, on this occasion, hailed the master's remarks with hearty peals of laughter. Nettled at this, Willie resolved he would 'speak up' to Rodger; but first he asked Burns in a whisper if he would support him, which Burns promised to do. He then said that he was sorry to find that Robert and he had given offence; it had not been intended. And indeed he had expected that the master would have been rather pleased to know of their endeavours to improve their minds. He could assure him that such improvement was the sole object they had in view. Rodger sneered at the idea of their improving their minds by nonsensical discussions, and contemptuously asked what it was they disputed about. Willie replied, that generally there was a new subject every day; that he could not recollect all that had come under their attention; but the question of to-day had been, 'Whether is a great general or a respectable merchant the most valuable member of society?' The dominie laughed outrageously at what he called the silliness of such a question, seeing there could be no doubt for a moment about it. 'Well,' said Burns, 'if you think so, I will be glad if you take any side you please, and

allow me to take the other, and let us discuss it before the school.' Rodger most unwisely assented, and commenced the argument by a flourish in favour of the general. Burns answered by a pointed advocacy of the pretensions of the merchant, and soon had an evident superiority over his preceptor. The latter replied, but without success. His hand was observed to shake; then his voice trembled; and he dissolved the house in a state of vexation pitiable to behold. In this anecdote, who can fail to read a prognostication of future eminence to the two disputants? The one became the most illustrious poet of his country; and it is not unworthy of being mentioned in the same sentence, that the other advanced, through a career of successful industry in his native town, to the possession of a good estate in its neighbourhood, and some share of the honours usually reserved in this country for birth and aristocratic connection.¹

The coast in the neighbourhood of Burns's residence at Ballochneil presented a range of rustic characters upon whom his genius was destined to confer an extraordinary interest. At the farm of Shanter, on a slope overlooking the shore, not far from Turnberry Castle, lived Douglas Graham, a stout hearty specimen of the Carrick farmer, a little addicted to smuggling, but withal a worthy and upright member of society, and a kind-natured man. He had a wife named Helen M'Taggart, who was unusually subject to superstitious beliefs and fears. The *steading* where this good couple lived is now no more, for the farm has been divided for the increase of two others in its neighbourhood; but genius has given them a perennial existence in the tale of 'Tam o' Shanter,' where their characters are exactly delineated under the respective appellations of Tam and Kate.

At Ballochneil, Burns engaged heartily in the sports of leaping, dancing, wrestling, *putting* (throwing) the stone, and others of the like kind. His innate thirst for distinction and superiority was manifested in these as in more important affairs; but though he was possessed of great strength, as well as skill, he could never match his young bedfellow John Niven. Obliged at last to acknowledge himself beaten by this person in bodily warfare, he had recourse for amends to a spiritual mode of contention, and would engage young Niven in an argument about some speculative question, when, of course, he invariably proved victor. His satisfaction on these occasions is said to have been extreme. One

¹ 'Willie' was the late Mr Niven of Kilbride. He died in 1844.

day, as he was walking slowly along the street of the village in a manner customary to him, with his eyes bent on the ground, he was met by the Misses Biggar, the daughters of the parish pastor. He would have passed without noticing them, if one of the young ladies had not called him by name. She then rallied him on his inattention to the fair sex, in preferring to look towards the inanimate ground, instead of seizing the opportunity afforded him of indulging in the most invaluable privilege of man—that of beholding and conversing with the ladies. ‘Madam,’ said he, ‘it is a natural and right thing for man to contemplate the ground, from whence *he* was taken, and for woman to look upon and observe man, from whom *she* was taken.’ This was a conceit, but it was the conceit of ‘no vulgar boy.’

Burns, according to his own account, concluded his residence at Kirkoswald in a blaze of passion for a fair *fillette* who lived next door to the school. At this time, owing to the destruction of the proper school of Kirkoswald, a chamber at the end of the old church, the business of parochial instruction was conducted in an apartment on the ground-floor of a house in the main street of the village, opposite the church-yard. From behind this house, as from behind each of its neighbours in the same row, a small stripe of kail-yard (*Anglice*, kitchen-garden) runs back about fifty yards, along a rapidly ascending slope. When Burns went into the particular patch behind the school to take the sun’s altitude, he had only to look over a low enclosure to see the similar patch connected with the next house. Here, it seems, Peggy Thomson, the daughter of the rustic occupant of that house, was walking at the time, though more probably engaged in the business of cutting a cabbage for the family dinner, than imitating the flower-gathering Proserpine, or her prototype Eve. The sight seems to have been as a stroke of the sun to him, proving fatal to all serious study. He tells us of his writing a song on this rustic maiden; but there is reason to believe that this was not done till some years afterwards, when his acquaintance with her was temporarily renewed.

It is difficult to ascertain from his own statements, even with the aid of his brother’s and sister’s, the order of such early attempts at rhyme as have been preserved. In arranging them here, I cannot profess to have attained more than an approximation to accuracy. There is one little song, which he says he composed at seventeen; from its style, and from its resemblance both in ideas and expressions to Mrs Cockburn’s ‘Flowers of the

Forest,' which was published in a collection (*The Lark*) possessed by Burns, it certainly may be ranked as one of his earliest efforts.¹

I DREAMED I LAY.

I dreamed I lay where flowers were springing
 Gaily in the sunny beam ;
 Listening to the wild birds singing,
 By a falling, crystal stream :
 Straight the sky grew black and daring ;
 Through the woods the whirlwinds rave ;
 Trees with aged arms were warring,
 O'er the swelling drumlie wave.

Such was my life's deceitful morning,
 Such the pleasure I enjoyed ;
 But lang or noon, loud tempests storming,
 A' my flowery bliss destroyed.
 Though fickle Fortune has deceived me,
 She promised fair, and performed but ill ;
 Of mony a joy and hope bereaved me,
 I bear a heart shall support me still.

ere

He himself tells us of a truly ambitious design which he had already formed: he had sketched, he says, the outlines of a tragedy, and was only prevented from going on by the bursting of a cloud of family misfortunes. At that time he wrote down nothing, so that nearly the whole escaped his memory. 'The following,' he says, 'was an exclamation from a great character—great in occasional instances of generosity, and daring at times in villainies. He is supposed to meet with a child of misery, and exclaims to himself:—

" All devil as I am, a damned wretch,
 A hardened, stubborn, unrepenting villain,
 Still my heart melts at human wretchedness ;
 And with sincere, though unavailing sighs,
 I view the helpless children of distress.

¹ Compare—

Lang or noon loud tempests storming.—*Burns.*
 Loud tempests storming before parting day.—*Mrs C.*

Swelling drumlie wave.—*Burns.*
 Grow drumlie and dark.—*Mrs C.*

Though fickle Fortune has deceived me.—*Burns.*
 O fickle Fortune, why this cruel sporting ?—*Mrs C.*

I bear a heart shall support me still.—*Burns.*
 Thy frowns cannot fear me, thy smiles cannot cheer me.—*Mrs C.*

With tears indignant I behold the oppressor
Rejoicing in the honest man's destruction,
Whose unsubmitting heart was all his crime.
Even you, ye helpless crew, I pity you ;
Ye whom the seeming good think sin to pity ;
Ye poor, despised, abandoned vagabonds,
Whom vice, as usual, has turned o'er to ruin.
—Oh, but for kind, though ill-requited friends,
I had been driven forth like you forlorn,
The most detested, worthless wretch among you !”

‘The oppressor,’ we cannot doubt, was the factor whose lot it was to put poor William Burness to the exigencies of the law for the arrears at Mount Oliphant.

To take up his own narrative at the point where it was formerly dropped, the conclusion of the visit to Carrick :—‘I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson’s and Shenstone’s works. I had seen human nature in a new phasis ; and I engaged several of my school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne’s reign, and I pored over them most devoutly : I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me ; and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three farthings’ worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of day-book and ledger.

‘My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l’amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure ; Sterne and Mackenzie—*Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling*—were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half-a-dozen or more pieces on hand ; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme ; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell soothed all into quiet ! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except “Winter ; a Dirge,” the eldest of my printed pieces ; “The Death of Poor

Mailie," "John Barleycorn," and songs first, second, and third.¹ Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school business.

'My twenty-third year was to me an important era. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flaxdresser in a neighbouring town (Irvine), to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair. My ***;² and, to finish the whole, as we were giving a welcome carousal to the New Year, the shop took fire and burnt to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.'

'I was obliged to give up this scheme: the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head; and, what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption; and, to crown my distresses, a *belle fille* whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—*Depart from me, ye accursed!*

'From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea, where, after a variety of good and ill fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him, he had been set on shore by an American privateer on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of everything. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding that he is at this time master of a large West Indiaman belonging to the Thames.'

'His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded. I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper

¹ Those respectively beginning—"It was upon a Lammas-night," "Now westlin winds and
slaughtering guns," and "Behind yon hills where Stinsiar flows."

² From the original letter in the possession of Peter Cunningham, Esq., it appears that the blank here left by Dr Currie was occupied by a charge of a sweeping nature against the proanity of his partner.

channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror.¹ Herc his friendship did me a mischief; and the consequence was, that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the "Poet's Welcome." My reading only increased, while in this town, by two stray volumes of *Pamela*, and one of *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious picces that are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the hell-hounds that prowl in the kennel of Justice; but we made a shift to collect a little money in the family amongst us, with which, to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my hairbrained imagination, as well as my soeial and amorous madness; but in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.²

To this rapid sketch of the Lochlea section of his life may be fitly appended the recital of his brother Gilbert for the same period:

"The seven years we lived in Torbolton parish (extending from the seventeenth to the twenty-fourth of my brother's age²) were not marked by much literary improvement; but during this time the foundation was laid of certain habits in my brother's character which afterwards beeame but too prominent, and which malice and envy have taken delight to enlarge on. Though, when young, he was bashful and awkward in his intercourse with women, yet when he approached manhood, his attachment to their society beeame very strong, and he was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver. The symptoms of his passion were often such as nearly to equal those of the celebrated Sappho. I never indeed knew that he fainted, sunk, and died away; but the agitations of his mind and body exceeded anything of the kind I ever knew in real life. He had always a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself, or who had more consequence in life. His love, therefore, rarely settled on persons of this description. When he selected any one out of the sovereignty of his good pleasure, to whom he

¹ The individual here alluded to was named Richard Brown. See afterwards, under date February 1788.

² In reality, from the nineteenth to the twenty-sixth.

should pay his particular attention, she was instantly invested with a sufficient stock of charms out of the plentiful stores of his own imagination ; and there was often a great disparity between his fair captivator and her attributes.¹ One generally reigned paramount in his affections ; but as Yorick's affections flowed out toward Madame de L—— at the remise door, while the eternal vows of Eliza were upon him, so Robert was frequently encountering other attractions, which formed so many under-plots in the drama of his love. As these connections were governed by the strictest rules of virtue and modesty (from which he never deviated till he reached his twenty-third year), he became anxious to be in a situation to marry. This was not likely to be soon the case while he remained a farmer, as the stocking of a farm required a sum of money he had no probability of being master of for a great while. He began, therefore, to think of trying some other line of life. He and I had for several years taken land of my father for the purpose of raising flax on our own account. In the course of selling it, Robert began to think of turning flaxdresser, both as being suitable to his grand view of settling in life, and as subservient to the flax raising. He, accordingly, wrought at the business of a flax-dresser in Irvine for six months, but abandoned it at that period, as neither agreeing with his health nor inclination. In Irvine he had contracted some acquaintance of a freer manner of thinking and living than he had been used to, whose society prepared him for overleaping the bounds of rigid virtue which had hitherto restrained him. * * * * During this period also he became a freemason, which was his first introduction to the life of a boon-companion. Yet, notwithstanding these circumstances, and the praise he has bestowed on Scotch drink (which seems to have misled his historians), I do not recollect, during these seven years, nor till towards the end of his commencing author (when his growing celebrity occasioned his being often in company), to have ever seen him intoxicated ; nor was he at all given to drinking.'

For the first three or four years at Lochlea we have no details of the poet's life. There are very few compositions which can be certainly traced to this period. It was a time of comparative comfort for the Burness family, although marked not less than any other by extreme application to labour. The family was a

¹ This passage is restored from a letter of Gilbert Burns in possession of Joseph Mayer, Esq., Liverpool. The passage substituted by Dr Currie is—‘a great dissimilitude between his fair captivator, as she appeared to others, and as she seemed when invested with the attributes he gave her.’

remarkable one in the district. They kept more by themselves than is common in their class. Their superior intelligence and refinement, and a certain air of self-respect which they bore amidst all the common drudgeries of their situation, caused them to be looked upon as people of a superior sort. Country neighbours who happened to enter their family-room (that is, the kitchen) at the dinner-hour, were surprised to find them all—father, brothers, and sisters—sitting each with a book in one hand, while they used their spoons with the other.

Gilbert Burns used to speak of his brother as being at this period, to himself, a more admirable being than at any other. He recalled with delight the days when they had to go with one or two companions to cut peats for the winter fuel, because Robert was sure to enliven their toil with a rattling fire of witty remarks on men and things, mingled with the expressions of a genial glowing heart, and the whole perfectly free from the taint which he afterwards acquired from his contact with the world. Not even in those volumes which afterwards charmed his country from end to end, did Gilbert see his brother in so interesting a light as in these conversations in the bog, with only two or three noteless peasants for an audience.

It was not alone with the wondrous elder-born of the family that literary feeling resided. Agnes, as she sat with her two sisters, Annabella and Isabella, milking the cows, would delight them by reciting the poetry with which her mind was stored—as the ballad of ‘Sir James the Rose,’ the ‘Flowers of the Forest,’ or the second version of the 145th psalm in the Scottish translation. Gilbert was nearly as noted as Robert for his studies in English literature, limited as these were. Within themselves, they were most happy and united. The father and mother were venerated by their children; the children were to each other kind and affectionate. Robert was specially a favourite with all about the house, because of his kindly disposition and good temper. Gilbert had somewhat of a severity in his manner, particularly when he thought there was occasion for reproof; but Robert took everything mildly. A female cousin of theirs, who had helped them in the work of their farm when a very young girl, lately survived to relate that, when binding behind the reapers on the harvest-field, Robert ‘was always anxious to solace and cheer, and assist the younger labourers. When Gilbert spoke sharply to them, the good-natured poet would exclaim: “Oh, man, ye are no for young folk;” and he was ready with a helping-hand and

a look of encouragement.'¹ The very cattle and other animals about the farm felt that they met in him with a superior clemency.

The exterior of the young poet had, nevertheless, at first sight, exactly that heavy and repelling character which has been described as belonging to his father. Dr Mackenzie, who attended the family in a medical capacity, is clear upon this point. He says: 'Gilbert, in the first interview I had with him at Lochlea, was frank, modest, well informed, and communicative. The poet seemed distant, suspicious, and without any wish to interest or please. He kept himself very silent in a dark corner of the room; and before he took any part in the conversation, I frequently detected him scrutinising me during my conversation with his father and brother.' Afterwards, 'when the conversation, which was on a medical subject, had taken the turn he wished, he began to engage in it, displaying a dexterity of reasoning, an ingenuity of reflection, and a familiarity with topics apparently beyond his reach, by which his visitor was no less gratified than astonished.'²

The love affairs of the Scottish peasantry were, in those days, and in some measure are still, conducted in what appears a singular manner. The young farmer or ploughman, after his day of exhausting toil, would proceed to the home of his mistress, one, two, three, or more miles distant, there signal her to the door, and then the pair would seat themselves in the barn for an hour or two's conversation. It was a primitive fashion, owing its origin probably to the limited domestic accommodations of early times, and fathers and mothers appear to have found no occasion for visiting it with condemnation. In the parish of Torbolton, Robert Burns both launched into this mode of courtship himself, and helped in the similar courtships of others.³ Gilbert tells us that he was not aspiring in his loves. He made no distinction between the farmer's own daughters and those who acted as his servants—the fact, after all, being, that the servants were often themselves the daughters of farmers, only sent to be the hirelings of others because their services were not needed at home. A surviving companion of the poet in these early days, says that he composed

¹ From a Ramble among the Scenery of Burns in '*The Highland Note-book*, by R. Carruthers, Inverness.'

² Walker's *Life of Burns*.

³ In October 1837, the editor conversed at Torbolton with John Lees, shoemaker, who, when a stripling, used to act as Burns's second in his courting expeditions. The old man spoke with much glee of the aid he had given the poet in the way of asking out lasses for him. When he had succeeded in bringing the girl out of doors, he of course became *Monsieur de Trop*, and Burns would say: 'Now, Jock, ye may gang hame.'

a song on almost every tolerable-looking lass in the parish, and finally one in which they were all included. Such ditties must have failed afterwards to satisfy his taste, or he would probably have printed them. There is only one, of a kind truly poetical, which has come down to us :—

MY NANNIE, O.

TUNE—*My Nannie, O.*

Behind yon hills where Stinsiar flows,¹
 'Mang moors and mosses many, O,
 The wintry sun the day has closed,
 And I'll awa' to Nannie, O.

The westlin wind blaws loud and shill ;
 The night's baith mirk and rainy, O ;
 But I'll get my plaid, and out I'll steal,
 And owre the hills to Nannie, O.

My Nannie's charming, sweet, and young ;
 Nae artfu' wiles to win ye, O :
 May ill befa' the flattering tongue
 That wad beguile my Nannie, O !

Her face is fair, her heart is true,
 As spotless as she's bonny, O :
 The opening gowan, wet wi' dew,
 Nae purer is than Nannie, O.

daisy

A country lad is my degree,
 And few there be that ken me, O ;
 But what care I how few they be ?
 I'm weelcome aye to Nannie, O.

My riches a's my penny-fee,
 And I maun guide it canny, O ;
 But warl's gear ne'er troubles me,
 My thoughts are a'—my Nannie, O.

wages

world's wealth

Our auld guidman delights to view
 His sheep and kye thrive bonny, O ;
 But I'm as blithe that hauds his pleugh,
 And has nae care but Nannie, O.

¹ In subsequent copies, Burns was induced to substitute for the *Stinsiar*, which has local verity in its favour, the *Lugar*, a name thought to be more euphonious, but which is otherwise unsuitable.

Come weel, come wo, I care nae by,
 I'll tak what Heaven will send me, O ;
 Nae ither care in life have I,
 But live and love my Nannie, O.

This charming lyric not merely expresses the perfection of pure and simple love, as presumably felt by a ‘country lad,’ but verifies the mode of his courtship, as above described. It is a winter evening. The rustic bard, at Lochlea, sees the southerly sun terminating its short course behind the Carrick Hills. Notwithstanding that the night is cold, dark, and rainy, he resolves to steal out, and go over the hill to visit the simple and trusting maiden who for the present reigns in his heart. The song also breathes the purity of the poet’s feelings in his earlier days. It is pleasant to know, as we do from Mrs Begg, that his father lived to see this song, and expressed for it his hearty admiration.¹

Other songs of the period are of a humorous cast, shewing that the course of the poet’s loves did not always run quite smooth. It was in the following doughty strain that he addressed a neighbouring maiden,² who chose to consider herself as somewhat too good for him :—

TIBBIE, I HAE SEEN THE DAY.

TUNE—*Invercauld's Reel.*

O Tibbie, I hae seen the day
 Ye wad na been sae shy ;
 For lack o’ gear ye lightly me, slight
 But, trowth, I care na by.

Yestreen I met you on the moor,
 Ye spak na, but gaed by like stoure ; dust
 Ye geck at me because I’m poor, mock
 But fient a hair care I.

I doubt na, lass, but ye may think,
 Because ye hae the name o’ clink, money
 That ye can please me at a wink,
 Whene’er you like to try.

But sorrow tak him that’s sae mean,
 Although his pouch o’ coin were clean,
 Wha follows ony saucy quean, wench
 That looks sae proud and high.

¹ See Appendix, No. 4.

² One named Isabella Steven or Stein.

Although a lad were c'er sae smart,
If that he want the yellow dirt,
Ye'll cast your head another airt,
And answer him fu' dry.

direction

But if he hae the name o' gear,
Ye'll fasten to him like a brier,
Though hardly he, for sense or leär,
Be better than the kye.

wealth

But, Tibbie, lass, tak my advice,
Your daddie's gear maks you sae nice;
The deil a ane wad speer your price,
Were ye as poor as I.

learning

There lives a lass in yonder park,
I would na gie her in her sark,
For thee, wi' a' thy thousan' mark ;
Ye need na look sac high.

The following off-hand verses can scarcely be considered as a song, and they are strikingly inferior to his average efforts; yet, as expressive of a mood of his feelings regarding his fair neighbours in those days of simplicity, they appear not unworthy of preservation :—

THE TORBOLTON LASSES.

If ye gae up to yon hill-tap,
Ye'll there see bonnie Peggy;
She kens her father is a laird,
And she forsooth's a leddy.

There Sophy tight, a lassie bright,
Besides a handsome fortune :
Wha canna win her in a night,
Has little art in courting.

Gae down by Faile, and taste the ale,
And tak a look o' Mysie ;
She's dour and din, a deil within,
But ablins she may please ye.

obstinate
perhaps

If she be shy, her sister try,
Ye'll maybe faney Jenny,
If ye'll dispense wi' want o' sense—
She kens hersel she's bonnie.

As ye gae up by yon hillside,
Speer in for bonnie Bessy;
She'll gie ye a beck, and bid ye light,
And handsomely address ye.

courtesy

There's few sae bonnie, nane sae guid,
In a' King George' dominion ;
If ye should doubt the truth o' this—
It's Bessy's ain opinion !

It is rather remarkable that the young bard overlooks in this catalogue of damsels, a group who were certainly the predominant belles of the district, seeing that they were not merely good-looking girls, rather better educated than the Torbolton sisterhood, but the children of a man of considerable substance. Robert and Gilbert Burns were both on intimate terms in this family. The latter at one time made tender advances, which were not destined to be accepted. Robert was too proud to venture on a refusal. This appears from a set of verses much resembling the last quoted, but more valuable for the illustration they afford of the poet's feelings and circumstances at this early period:—

In Torbolton, ye ken, there are proper young men,
And proper young lasses and a' man;
But ken ye the Ronalds that live in the Bennals,¹
They carry the gree frae them a', man.

palm

Their father's a laird, and weel he can spare't,
Braid money to tocher them a', man,
To proper young men, he'll clink in the hand
Gowd guineas a hunder or twa, man.

portion

There's ane they ca' Jean, I'll warrant ye 've seen
As bonnie a lass or as braw, man;
But for sense and guid taste she'll vie wi' the best,
And a conduct that beautifies a', man.

The charms o' the min', the langer they shine,
The mair admiration they draw, man;
While peaches and cherries, and roses and lilies,
They fade and they wither awa, man.

If ye be for Miss Jean, tak this frae a frien',
A hint o' a rival or twa, man,
The Laird o' Blackbyre wad gang through the fire,
If that wad entice her awa, man.

¹ The Bennals is a farm in the western part of the parish, near Afton Lodge, and several miles from Lochlea.

The Laird o' Brachead has been on his speed,
 For mair than a towmoud or twa, man ;
 The Laird o' the Ford will straught on a board,
 If he canna get her at a', man.

Then Anna comes in, the pride o' her kin,
 The boast of our bachelors a', man :
 Sae sonsy and sweet, sae fully complete,
 She steals our affections awa, man. comely

If I should detail the pick and the walc
 O' lasses that live here awa, man,
 The fault wad be mine, if they didna shine,
 The sweetest and best o' them a', man.

I lo'e her mysel, but darena weel tell,
 My poverty keeps me in awe, man,
 For making o' rhymes, and working at times,
 Does little or naething at a', man.

Yet I wadna choose to let her refuse,
 Nor hae't in her power to say na, man ;
 For though I be poor, unnoticed, obscure,
 My stomach's as proud as them a', man.

Though I canna ride in weel-booted pride,
 And flee o'er the hills like a craw, man,
 I can haud up my head wi' the best o' the breed,
 Though fluttering ever so braw, man.

My coat and my vest, they are Scotch o' the best,
 O' pairs o' guid breeks I hae twa, man,
 And stockings and pumps to put on my stumps,
 And ne'er a wrang steek in them a', man.

My sarks they are few, but five o' them new, shirts
 'Twal' hundred,¹ as white as the snaw, man,
 A ten shillings hat, a Holland cravat ;
 There are no mony poets sae braw, man.

I never had frien's, weel stockit in means,
 To leave me a hundred or twa, man ;
 Nae weel-tochered aunts, to wait on their drants, long prayers
 And wish them in hell for it a', man.

¹ A kind of cloth.

I never was canny for hoarding o' money,
 Or caughtin' t'gether at a', man,
 I've little to spend, and naething to lend,
 But deevil a shilling I awe, man.

lucky
catching

* * * *

Mingled with these moods of tenderness and raillery, there were doubtless others involving deeper emotions. The story of Wallace, as reduced by Hamilton of Gilbertfield from the ancient poem of Blind Harry, had made a great impression on Burns's mind, as it usually does, or did, on those of all young Scotsmen possessed of ardent and generous feelings. He tells us that, in his earlier years, he often stole out after the labours of the day to spend a solitary hour of tearful sympathy over the tale of 'Scotia's ill-requited chief.' One couplet relative to an adventure which took place near his own locality had struck him—

‘Syne to the Leglen Wood, when it was late,
 To make a silent and a safe retreat.’

‘I chose,’ he says, ‘a fine summer Sunday, the only day my life allowed, and walked half-a-dozen miles to pay my respects to the Leglen Wood, with as much enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged, I recollect—for even then I was a rhymer—that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits.’ To only a more general purport of the same character is his thrilling verse—

Even then a wish (I mind its power)—
 A wish that to my latest hour
 Shall strongly heave my breast,
 That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
 Some usefu' plan or beuk could make,
 Or sing a sang at least.
 The rough, bur-thistle spreading wide
 Among the bearded bear,
 I turned the weeder-clips aside,
 And spared the symbol dear!

Dr Currie touches well the higher emotions of the young genius in these days which he himself thought aimless:—‘While the ploughshare under his guidance passed through the sward, or the grass fell under the sweep of his scythe, he was humming the songs of his country, musing on the deeds of ancient valour, or

wrapt in the illusions of fancy, as her enchantments rose on his view. Happily, the Sunday is yet a Sabbath on which man and beast rest from their labours. On this day, therefore, Burns could indulge in a free intercourse with the charms of nature. It was his delight to wander alone on the banks of the Ayr, whose stream is now immortal, and to listen to the song of the blackbird at the close of the summer's day. But still greater was his pleasure, as he himself informs us, in walking on the sheltered side of a wood, in a cloudy winter day, and hearing the storm rave among the trees; and more elevated still his delight to ascend some eminence during the agitations of nature; to stride along its summit, while the lightning flashed around him; and amidst the howlings of the tempest, to apostrophise the spirit of the storm. Such situations he declares most favourable to devotion:—“Wrapt in enthusiasm, I seem to ascend towards Him *who walks on the wings of the winds.*”¹

Towards the close of 1780, when the poet was completing his twenty-second year, we find a new exhibition of his intellectual activity in the institution of a debating club at Torbolton, the village forming the centre of the parish in which he lived. The following document, afterwards written in the book of the club, gives an account of this laudable association:—

‘ HISTORY OF THE RISE, PROCEEDINGS, AND REGULATIONS OF THE BACHELORS’ CLUB.

“ Of birth or blood we do not boast,
Nor gentry does our club afford;
But ploughmen and mechanics we
In Nature’s simple dress record.”¹

‘ As the great end of human society is to become wiser and better, this ought, therefore, to be the principal view of every man, in every station of life. But as experience has taught us that such studies as inform the head and mend the heart, when long continued, are apt to exhaust the faculties of the mind, it has been found proper to relieve and unbend the mind by some employment or another, that may be agreeable enough to keep its powers in exercise, but at the same time not so serious as to exhaust them. But, superadded to this, by far the greater part of mankind are under the necessity of *earning the sustenance of human life by the labour of their bodies*, whereby not only the faculties of mind,

¹ These lines are by David Sillar.—*Professor Walker.* The authorship of the prose which follows may be doubted. Though involving some just observations, it is in a style somewhat clumsy, and therefore not very likely to be the production of Burns.

but the nerves and sinews of the body are so fatigued, that it is absolutely necessary to have recourse to some amusement or diversion to relieve the wearied man, worn down with the necessary labours of life.

' As the best of things, however, have been perverted to the worst of purposes, so, under the pretence of amusement and diversion, men have plunged into all the madness of riot and dissipation ; and instead of attending to the grand design of human life, they have begun with extravagance and folly, and ended with guilt and wretchedness. Impressed with these considerations, we, the following lads in the parish of Torbolton—namely, Hugh Reid, Robert Burns, Gilbert Burns, Alexander Brown, Walter Mitchell, Thomas Wright, and William M'Gavin—resolved, for our mutual entertainment, to unite ourselves into a club, or society, under such rules and regulations that, while we should forget our cares and labours in mirth and diversion, we might not transgress the bounds of innocence and decorum ; and after agreeing on these, and some other regulations, we held our first meeting at Torbolton, in the house of John Richard, upon the evening of the 11th November 1780, commonly called Hallowe'en, and after choosing Robert Burns president for the night, we proceeded to debate on this question—" Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person nor agreeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough ; the other of them a girl every way agreeable in person, conversation, and behaviour, but without any fortune—which of them shall he choose ? " Finding ourselves very happy in our society, we resolved to continue to meet once a month in the same house, in the way and manner proposed ; and shortly thereafter we chose Robert Ritchie for another member. In May 1781, we brought in David Sillar, and in June, Adam Jamieson, as members. About the beginning of the year 1782, we admitted Matthew Paterson and John Orr ; and in June following, we chose James Paterson as a proper brother for such a society. The club being thus increased, we resolved to meet at Torbolton on the race-night, the July following, and have a dance in honour of our society. Accordingly, we did meet each one with a partner, and spent the evening in such innocence and merriment, such cheerfulness and good-humour, that every brother will long remember it with pleasure and delight.'

The rules of this club excluded only religious subjects. The last, being the tenth, appears characteristic of Burns :—

' Every man proper for a member of this society must have a frank, honest, open heart ; above anything dirty or mean ; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex.

No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club, and especially no mean-spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall upon any pretence whatever be admitted. In short, the proper person for this society is a cheerful, honest-hearted lad, who if he has a friend that is true, and a mistress that is kind, and as much wealth as genteelly to make both ends meet, is just as happy as this world can make him.'

Dr Currie found in Burns's papers some detached memoranda, shewing that he took some care to prepare himself for the debates. Amongst others, were the heads of a speech on the *imprudent* side in the question for the opening night. The following may serve as a further specimen of the questions debated in the society at Torbolton :—‘Whether do we derive more happiness from love or friendship?’ ‘Whether between friends, who have no reason to doubt each other’s friendship, there should be any reserve?’ ‘Whether is the savage man or the peasant of a civilised country, in the most happy situation?’ ‘Whether is a young man of the lower ranks of life likeliest to be happy who has got a good education, and his mind well informed, or he who has just the education and information of those around him?’

The name of David Sillar is mentioned in the history of the club as a new entrant in May 1781. He was a young man of education somewhat above his rustic compeers, and of a verse-making tendency. Burns and he formed an intimate friendship, which lasted with great intensity as long as the former remained in the parish. An account by Mr Sillar of the forming of this intimacy gives us perhaps the best description of Burns in these youthful obscure days that we have. He says: ‘Mr Robert Burns was some time in the parish of Torbolton prior to my acquaintance with him. His social disposition easily procured him acquaintance; but a certain satirical seasoning, with which he and all poetical geniuses are in some degree influenced [?], while it set the rustic circle in a roar, was not unaccompanied by its kindred attendant—suspicious fear. I recollect hearing his neighbours observe he had a great deal to say for himself, and that they suspected his principles [meaning, we presume, his orthodoxy]. He wore the only tied hair in the parish; and in the church, his plaid, which was of a particular colour, I think fillemot, he wrapped in a particular manner round his shoulders. These surmises, and his exterior, had such a magical influence on my curiosity, as made me particularly solicitous of his acquaintance. Whether my

acquaintance with Gilbert was casual or premeditated, I am not now certain. By him I was introduced not only to his brother, but to the whole of that family, where in a short time I became a frequent, and, I believe, not unwelcome visitant. After the commencement of my acquaintance with the bard, we frequently met upon Sundays at church, when, between sermons [services], instead of going with our friends or lasses to the inn, we often took a walk in the fields. In these walks I have frequently been struck by his facility in addressing the fair sex; and many times, when I have been bashfully anxious how to express myself, he would have entered into conversation with them with the greatest ease and freedom: and it was generally a death-blow to our conversation, however agreeable, to meet a female acquaintance. Some of the few opportunities of a noontide walk that a country-life allows her laborious sons he spent on the banks of the river, or in the woods in the neighbourhood of Stair, a situation peculiarly adapted to the genius of a rural bard. Some book (especially one of those mentioned in his letter to Mr Murdoch) he always carried, and read when not otherwise employed. It was likewise his custom to read at table. In one of my visits to Lochlea, in time of a sowen¹ supper, he was so intent on reading, I think *Tristram Shandy*, that his spoon falling out of his hand made him exclaim, in a tone scarcely imitable, “Alas, poor Yorick!” Such was Burns, and such were his associates, when, in May 1781, I was admitted a member of the Bachelors’ Club.²

The proceedings of the club suggest that Burns, when only advancing to the close of his twenty-second year, had turned his thoughts to matrimony, for there can be little doubt that the first question was of his propounding. It does appear that about this time he had met a young woman possessing many highly agreeable qualities, though ‘without any fortune,’ on whose hand he had serious views. Her name was Ellison Begbie, the daughter of a small farmer in the parish of Galston: she was now a servant with a family on the banks of the Cessnock, about two miles from the home of the Burnesses. Ellison was not at all a beauty, but yet there was a fascination about her that made her much run after by the young men of the neighbourhood. Her charms lay in the life and grace of the mind; in this respect she was so much superior to ordinary girls of her station, that Burns, in maturer

¹ Sowens, a mess composed of the farina gathered by steeping the husks of grain.

² Letter to Mr Aiken of Ayr, in Morison’s edition of Burns.

years, after he had seen Edinburgh ladies, acknowledged to his family that she was, of all the women he had ever seriously addressed, the one most likely to have formed an agreeable companion for life. On her he composed what he called a song of similes—a curious conceit in versification, but yet containing many exquisite lines :—

O N C E S S N O C K B A N K S.¹

TUNE—If he be a Butcher neat and trim.

On Cessnock Banks there lives a lass ;
 Could I describe her shape and mien,
 The graces of her weel-faured face, well-favoured
 And the glancing of her sparkling een !

She's fresher than the morning dawn
 When rising Phœbus first is seen,
 When dew-drops twinkle o'er the lawn ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

She's stately like yon youthful ash,
 That grows the cowslip braes between,
 And shoots its head above each bush ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

She's spotless as the flowering thorn,
 With flowers so white and leaves so green,
 When purest in the dewy morn ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

Her looks are like the sportive lamb,
 When flowery May adorns the scene,
 That wantons round its bleating dam ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

Her hair is like the curling mist
 That shades the mountain-side at e'en,
 When flower-reviving rains are past ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

¹ This piece appeared for the first time in Cromeck's *Reliques*, the editor stating that he had recovered it 'from the oral communication of a lady residing at Glasgow, whom the bard in early life affectionately admired.' It seems not unlikely that Ellison herself had grown into this lady. A copy printed from the poet's manuscript in Pickering's edition of his works is considerably different in one stanza, presents an additional one, and exhibits a different concluding line to each verse—

‘An' she's twa sparkling roguish een.’

Her forehead's like the showery bow,
 When shining sunbeams intervene,
 And gild the distant mountain's brow ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

Her voice is like the evening thrush
 That sings in Cessnock Banks unseen,
 While his mate sits nestling in the bush ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

Her lips are like the cherries ripe
 That sunny walls from Boreas screen—
 They tempt the taste and charm the sight ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

Her teeth are like a flock of sheep,
 With fleeces newly washen clean,
 That slowly mount the rising steep ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.¹

Her breath is like the fragrant breeze
 That gently stirs the blossomed bean,
 When Phœbus sinks beneath the seas ;
 And she's twa glancing sparkling een.

[Her cheeks are like yon crimson gem,
 The pride of all the flowery scene,
 Just opening on its thorny stem ;
 And she's twa sparkling roguish een.]²

But it's not her air, her form, her face,
 Though matching beauty's fabled queen,
 But the mind that shines in every grace,
 And chiefly in her sparkling een.

Mrs Begg remembers that her brother went frequently in the evening to pay his addresses to this damsel of the Cessnock, and, as he did not usually return till a late hour, his father at length took an alarm at the irregularity of his habits. The old man resolved to administer to his son the practical rebuke of sitting up to let him in, and also to give him a few words of gentle admonition.

¹ Variation in Pickering's copy :

Her teeth are like the nightly snow,
 While pale the morning rises keen,
 While hid the murmuring streamlets flow ;
 And she's twa sparkling roguish een.

² The above is the additional stanza in Pickering's edition.

When Robert returned that night, the father was there to administer the intended correction; but the young bard defeated his plan. On being asked what had detained him so long, he began a whimsical narration of what he had met with and seen of natural and supernatural on his way home, concluding with the particulars afterwards wrought up in the well-known verses in his ‘Address to the Deil’—

Ae dreary, windy, winter night,
The stars shot down wi’ sklentin’ light,
Wi’ you mysel I got a fright,
 Ayont the lough;
Yc like a rash bush stood in sight,
 Wi’ waving sough.

The cudgel in my sieve did shake,
Each bristled hair stood like a stake,
When wi’ an eldrich, stoor quaick—quaick—
 Amang the springs,
Awa ye squattered like a drake,
 On whistling wings!

The old man was, in spite of himself, so much interested and amused by this recital, as to forget the intended scolding, and the affair ended in his sitting up for an hour or two by the kitchen fire enjoying the conversation of his gifted son.

The earliest specimens of Burns’s prose composition which we possess, are a series of letters to Ellison Begbie, most of them probably written in the winter of 1780–1—slightly pedantic in manner, as might be expected of a young genius still walking by the light of a vade-mecum of epistolary correspondence, and striving to educate his mind in a debating-club, yet wonderful as emanating from a youth in such a situation, and as addressed to a rustic serving-girl:¹—

TO ELLISON BEGBIE.

I verily believe, my dear E., that the pure genuine feelings of love are as rare in the world as the pure genuine principles of virtue and piety. This, I hope, will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon, I mean their being written in such a hasty manner, which, to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous

¹ Dr Currie printed this series of four letters in his first edition of the poet’s works, as ‘written about the year 1780.’ They were withdrawn from subsequent editions, for what reason does not appear. Allan Cunningham included them in his edition, with the conjectural date 1783, which is too far onward.

bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister. I don't know how it is, my dear, for though, except your company, there is nothing in earth gives me so much pleasure as writing to you, yet it never gives me those giddy raptures so much talked of among lovers. I have often thought that if a well-grounded affection be not really a part of virtue, 'tis something extremely akin to it. Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity, kindles in my breast, it extinguishes every dirty spark of malice and envy which are but too apt to infest me. I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathise with the miseries of the unfortunate. I assure you, my dear, I often look up to the Divine Disposer of events with an eye of gratitude for the blessing which I hope he intends to bestow on me in bestowing you. I sincerely wish that he may bless my endeavours to make your life as comfortable and happy as possible, both in sweetening the rougher parts of my natural temper, and bettering the unkindly circumstances of my fortune. This, my dear, is a passion, at least in my view, worthy of a man, and, I will add, worthy of a Christian. The sordid earthworm may profess love to a woman's person, whilst in reality his affection is centered in her pocket; and the slavish drudge may go a-wooing as he goes to the horse-market, to choose one who is stout and firm, and, as we may say of an old horse, one who will be a good drudge, and draw kindly. I disdain their dirty, puny ideas. I would be heartily out of humour with myself if I thought I were capable of having so poor a notion of the sex, which were designed to crown the pleasures of society. Poor devils! I don't envy them their happiness who have such notions. For my part, I propose quite other pleasures with my dear partner.

R. B.

TO THE SAME.

MY DEAR E.—I do not remember, in the course of your acquaintance and mine, ever to have heard your opinion on the ordinary way of falling in love amongst people of our station in life. I do not mean the persons who proceed in the way of bargain, but those whose affection is really placed on the person.

Though I be, as you know very well, but a very awkward lover myself, yet as I have some opportunities of observing the conduct of others who are much better skilled in the affair of courtship than I am, I often think it is owing to lucky chance more than to good management that there are not more unhappy marriages than usually are.

It is natural for a young fellow to like the acquaintance of the females, and customary for him to keep them company when occasion serves: some one of them is more agreeable to him than the rest—there is something, he knows not what, pleases him, he knows

not how, in her company. This I take to be what is called love with the greater part of us; and I must own, my dear E., it is a hard game such a one as you have to play when you meet with such a lover. You cannot refuse but he is sincere, and yet though you use him ever so favourably, perhaps in a few months, or at furthest in a year or two, the same unaccountable fancy may make him as distractedly fond of another, whilst you are quite forgot. I am aware that perhaps the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you, you may bid me take my own lesson home, and tell me that the passion I have professed for you is perhaps one of those transient flashes I have been describing; but I hope, my dear E., you will do me the justice to believe me, when I assure you that the love I have for you is founded on the sacred principles of virtue and honour, and by consequence so long as you continue possessed of those amiable qualities which first inspired my passion for you, so long must I continue to love you. Believe me, my dear, it is love like this alone which can render the marriage state happy. People may talk of flames and raptures as long as they please—and a warm fancy, with a flow of youthful spirits, may make them feel something like what they describe; but sure I am, the nobler faculties of the mind, with kindred feelings of the heart, can only be the foundation of friendship, and it has always been my opinion that the married life was only friendship in a more exalted degree. If you will be so good as to grant my wishes, and it should please Providence to spare us to the latest period of life, I can look forward and see that even then, though bent down with wrinkled age—even then, when all other worldly circumstances will be indifferent to me, I will regard my E. with the tenderest affection; and for this plain reason—because she is still possessed of those noble qualities, improved to a much higher degree, which first inspired my affection for her.

‘ Oh happy state, when souls each other draw,
When love is liberty, and nature law! ’

I know were I to speak in such a style to many a girl, who thinks herself possessed of no small share of sense, she would think it ridiculous; but the language of the heart is, my dear E., the only courtship I shall ever use to you.

When I look over what I have written, I am sensible it is vastly different from the ordinary style of courtship, but I shall make no apology—I know your good-nature will excuse what your good sense may see amiss.

R. B.

TO THE SAME.

I have often thought it a peculiarly unlucky circumstance in love, that, though in every other situation in life telling the truth is not only the safest, but actually by far the easiest way of proceeding, a lover is never under greater difficulty in acting, or

more puzzled for expression, than when his passion is sincere, and his intentions are honourable. I do not think that it is very difficult for a person of ordinary capacity to talk of love and fondness which are not felt, and to make vows of constancy and fidelity which are never intended to be performed, if he be villain enough to practise such detestable conduct; but to a man whose heart glows with the principles of integrity and truth, and who sincerely loves a woman of amiable person, uncommon refinement of sentiment, and purity of manners—to such a one, in such circumstances, I can assure you, my dear, from my own feelings at this present moment, courtship is a task indeed. There is such a number of foreboding fears and distrustful anxieties crowd into my mind when I am in your company, or when I sit down to write to you, that what to speak or what to write I am altogether at a loss.

There is one rule which I have hitherto practised, and which I shall invariably keep with you, and that is, honestly to tell you the plain truth. There is something so mean and unmanly in the arts of dissimulation and falsehood, that I am surprised they can be acted by any one in so noble, so generous a passion, as virtuous love. No, my dear E., I shall never endeavour to gain your favour by such detestable practices. If you will be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom-friend through life, there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by any arts unworthy of a man, and I will add, of a Christian. There is one thing, my dear, which I earnestly request of you, and it is this—that you would soon either put an end to my hopes by a peremptory refusal, or cure me of my fears by a generous consent.

It would oblige me much if you would send me a line or two when convenient. I shall only add further, that if a behaviour regulated (though perhaps but very imperfectly) by the rules of honour and virtue, if a heart devoted to love and esteem you, and an earnest endeavour to promote your happiness—if these are qualities you would wish in a friend, in a husband, I hope you shall ever find them in your real friend and sincere lover, R. B.

The removal of the poet to Irvine to learn flaxdressing took place at midsummer 1781. He says he took this step partly through whim, and partly because he wished to set about doing something in life. Gilbert is more explicit, and tells us that Robert, being anxious to be in a situation to marry, thought of turning flaxdresser, both as being suitable ‘to his grand view of settling in life,’ and as being subservient to the venture which the two brothers had made in raising flax upon their father’s farm. So far as his union with Ellison Begbie was in view, the plan was

nugatory, for it appears to have been just before his removal to Irvine that he had occasion to write the following letter to that young woman:—

TO ELLISON BEGBIE.

I ought, in good-manners, to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time, but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again, and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory: ‘you were sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me’—what, without you, I never can obtain—‘you wish me all kind of happiness.’ It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you would have given it a relish, that, wanting you, I can never taste.

Your uncommon personal advantages, and your superior good sense, do not so much strike me; these, possibly, may be met with in a few instances in others; but that amiable goodness, that tender feminine softness, that endearing sweetness of disposition, with all the charming offspring of a warm feeling heart—these I never again expect to meet with, in such a degree, in this world. All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond anything I have ever met in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface. My imagination has fondly flattered myself with a wish, I dare not say it ever reached a hope, that possibly I might one day call you mine. I had formed the most delightful images, and my fancy fondly brooded over them; but now I am wretched for the loss of what I really had no right to expect. I must now think no more of you as a mistress; still I presume to ask to be admitted as a friend. As such I wish to be allowed to wait on you; and as I expect to remove in a few days a little further off, and you, I suppose, will soon leave this place, I wish to see or hear from you soon; and if an expression should perhaps escape me rather too warm for friendship, I hope you will pardon it in, my dear Miss—(pardon me the dear expression for once) * * * *

R. B.

How it happened that Ellison saw fit to refuse the poet's hand, does not appear.

He, nevertheless, commenced his enterprise, though it is to be feared in a depressed state of spirits. Irvine, a little seaport on the Firth of Clyde, then contained many small flax-dressing concerns, in connection with farms which were mainly, or in great part, devoted to the raising of the material. Amongst

these was one conducted by a person named Peacock. Here Robert fixed himself to acquire the skill of a craft by no means agreeable. The trade was carried on in one end of a small cottage, of which the other end was employed by a different person in keeping two or three work-horses. There is little remembered of the great poet in Irvine. Persons of importance could know nothing of an obscure country-lad working at a stifling trade in a cottage in the Smiddy-bar. Those who came in contact with him were chiefly of a kind to be little impressed by his rising talents. Yet he did not pass quite unnoticed. I conversed in 1826 with a person who had been often in his company while he lived in Irvine. What had been remarked in him was his melancholy. Amongst ordinary people he would sit for a considerable time with his head resting on his hand, and his elbow resting on his knee ; it was only when the company was joined by some man of superior intelligence, or by a female, that the young poet brightened up. His powers of argument were thought extraordinary. As has been seen, he formed an acquaintance in Irvine with a young sailor named Richard Brown, who talked of women in a manner which, according to his own account, sapped his hitherto virtuous principles. This youth, however, had sense to appreciate the budding genius of his friend. Burns himself, when he had attained distinction, thus wrote to Brown, recalling those Irvine days : ‘ Do you recollect a Sunday we spent together in Eglinton woods ? You told me, on my repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine. It was from this remark I derived the idea of my own pieces, which encouraged me to endeavour at the character of a poet.’¹ In Irvine, Burns met another person, who, many years after, spoke complacently to Professor Walker of having led him to take more liberal views than he had been accustomed to of religious questions. These were important points in his moral history, arising out of his residence in Irvine.

Towards the close of the year, we find him suffering from a severe nervous affection, accompanied by extreme hypochondria, under which he wrote the following letter to his father :—

IRVINE, December 27, 1781.

HONOURED SIR—I have purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year’s Day ;

¹ See letter of date December 30, 1787, onward.

but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder ; and, on the whole, I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past events nor look forward into futurity ; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity ; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life, for I assure you I am heartily tired of it ; and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

‘The soul, uneasy and confined at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.’

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer.¹ As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me : I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them ; but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it is yet too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr and Mrs Muir ; and with wishing you a merry New-year’s Day, I shall conclude. I am, honoured sir, your dutiful son,

ROBERT BURNS.

P.S.—My meal is nearly out ;² but I am going to borrow, till I get more.

¹ The verses of Scripture here alluded to are as follow :—

15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

² It is no uncommon case for a small farmer, or even cotter, in Scotland to have a son

It was probably at this time also—a time which he says he could not afterwards recall without a shudder—that he composed a series of poems expressive of deep suffering, including his ‘Winter, a Dirge,’ which he spoke of as the eldest of the pieces in his Edinburgh edition :—

WINTER, A DIRGE.

The wintry west extends his blast,
 And hail and rain does blaw ;
 Or, the stormy north sends driving forth
 The blinding sleet and snaw :
 While, tumbling brown, the burn comes down,
 And roars frae bank to brae ;
 And bird and beast in covert rest,
 And pass the heartless day.

‘The sweeping blast, the sky o’ercast,’¹
 The joyless winter day,
 Let others fear, to me more dear
 Than all the pride of May :
 The tempest’s howl, it soothes my soul,
 My griefs it seems to join ;
 The leafless trees my fancy please,
 Their fate resembles mine !

Thou Power Supreme, whose mighty scheme
 These woes of mine fulfil,
 Here, firm, I rest, they must be best,
 Because they are Thy will !
 Then all I want (oh, do Thou grant
 This one request of mine !)
 Since to enjoy Thou dost deny,
 Assist me to resign.

placed at some distant seminary of learning, or serving an apprenticeship to some metropolitan writer or tradesman; in which case the youth is almost invariably supplied with oatmeal, the staple of the poor Scotsman’s life—cheese, perhaps—oaten or barley bread, &c., from the home stores, by the intervention of the weekly or fortnightly carrier. The above passage recalls an anecdote which is related of a gentleman, afterwards high in consideration at the Scottish bar, whose father, a poor villager in the upper ward of Lanarkshire, having contrived to get him placed at Glasgow university, supported him there chiefly by a weekly bag of oatmeal. On one occasion the supply was stopped for nearly three weeks by a snow-storm. The young man’s meal, like Burns’s, was out; but his pride, or his having no intimate acquaintance, prevented him from borrowing. And this remarkable and powerful-minded man had all but perished before the dissolving snow allowed a new stock of provisions to reach him.

¹ Dr Young.

In the same spirit, and indeed expressive of the same idea, is

A PRAYER,

WRITTEN UNDER THE PRESSURE OF VIOLENT ANGUISH.

Oh Thou great Being ! what Thou art
Surpasses me to know :
Yet sure I am, that known to Thee
Are all Thy works below.

Thy creature here before Thee stands,
All wretched and distrest ;
Yet sure those ills that wring my soul
Obey Thy high behest.

Sure Thou, Almighty, canst not act
From cruelty or wrath !
Oh free my weary eyes from tears,
Or close them fast in death !

But if I must afflicted be,
To suit some wise design ;
Then man my soul with firm resolves,
To bear, and not repine !

After the feelings so pathetically expressed on the 27th of December, it certainly requires some consideration on the irregularity and fitfulness of all human emotions, to enable us to learn without surprise that on the 1st of January the poet was engaged in a merry-making of such a character, that the flaxdressing establishment became a prey to the flames. It might be supposed from his own narrative that he immediately deserted the business and Irvine together ; but his sister reports that he did not return to Lochlea till the ensuing March. Of this there is some evidence under his own hand, for in the little garret-room which he occupied, the stone chimney-piece still bears his initials, believed to have been inscribed by himself, together with the date 1782.

He tells us that about this time he had hung his harp upon the willows. Shortly, however, after his return to Lochlea and the plough, he took it down from those melancholy boughs, and strung it anew. Its strains were not as yet of witching excellence ; but one is of value, as expressive of the poet's present position and prospects in life.

MY FATHER WAS A FARMER.

TUNE—*The Weaver and his Shuttle, O.*

My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border, O,
 And carefully he bred me in decency and order, O ;
 He bade me act a manly part, though I had ne'er a farthing, O ;
 For without an honest manly heart no man was worth regarding, O.

Then out into the world my course I did determine, O ;
 Though to be rich was not my wish, yet to be great was charming, O :
 My talents they were not the worst, nor yet my education, O ;
 Resolved was I, at least to try, to mend my situation, O.

In many a way, and vain essay, I courted fortune's favour, O ;
 Some cause unseen still stept between, to frustrate each endeavour, O .
 Sometimes by foes I was o'erpowered, sometimes by friends
 forsaken, O ;
 And when my hope was at the top, I still was worst mistaken, O.

Then sore harassed, and tired at last, with fortune's vain delusion, O ,
 I dropt my schemes, like idle dreams, and came to this conclusion, O —
 The past was bad, and the future hid—its good or ill untried, O ;
 But the present hour was in my power, and so I would enjoy it, O .

No help, nor hope, nor view had I, nor person to befriend me, O ;
 So I must toil, and sweat, and broil, and labour to sustain me, O ;
 To plough and sow, to reap and mow, my father bred me early, O ;
 For one, he said, to labour bred, was a match for fortune fairly, O .

Thus all obscure, unknown, and poor, through life I'm doomed to
 wander, O ,
 Till down my weary bones I lay, in everlasting slumber, O .
 No view nor care, but shun whate'er might breed me pain or
 sorrow, O !
 I live to-day as well's I may, regardless of to-morrow, O .

But cheerful still I am as well as a monarch in a palace, O ,
 Though fortune's frown still hunts me down with all her wonted
 malice, O :
 I make indeed my daily bread, but ne'er can make it further, O ;
 But as daily bread is all I need, I do not much regard her, O .

When sometimes by my labour I earn a little money, O ,
 Some unforeseen misfortune comes generally upon me, O :
 Mischance, mistake, or by neglect, or my good-natured folly, O :
 But come what will, I've sworn it still, I'll ne'er be melancholy, O .

All you who follow wealth and power with unremitting ardour, O,
The more in this you look for bliss, you leave your view the
further, O :

Had you the wealth Potosi boasts, or nations to adore you, O,
A cheerful honest-hearted clown I will prefer before you, O.

We find him writing in a similar strain, but with a larger infusion of world-defying self-esteem, in a letter to his quondam preceptor, Murdoch :—

TO MR JOHN MURDOCH, SCHOOLMASTER, STAPLES' INN
BUILDINGS, LONDON.

LOCHLEA, 15th January 1783.

DEAR SIR—As I have an opportunity of sending you a letter without putting you to that expense which any production of mine would but ill repay, I embrace it with pleasure to tell you that I have not forgotten, nor ever will forget, the many obligations I lie under to your kindness and friendship.

I do not doubt, sir, but you will wish to know what has been the result of all the pains of an indulgent father and a masterly teacher, and I wish I could gratify your curiosity with such a recital as you would be pleased with ; but that is what I am afraid will not be the case. I have, indeed, kept pretty clear of vicious habits, and in this respect I hope my conduct will not disgrace the education I have gotten ; but as a man of the world, I am most miserably deficient. One would have thought that, bred as I have been under a father who has figured pretty well as *un homme des affaires*, I might have been what the world calls a pushing, active fellow ; but to tell you the truth, sir, there is hardly anything more my reverse. I seem to be one sent into the world to see and observe ; and I very easily compound with the knave who tricks me of my money, if there be anything original about him, which shews me human nature in a different light from anything I have seen before. In short, the joy of my heart is to ‘study men, their manners, and their ways ;’ and for this darling subject I cheerfully sacrifice every other consideration. I am quite indolent about those great concerns that set the bustling, busy sons of care agog ; and if I have to answer for the present hour, I am very easy with regard to anything further. Even the last, worst shift of the unfortunate and the wretched,¹ does not much terrify me : I know that my talent for what country folks call a sensible craek,² when once it is sanctified by a hoary head, would procure me so much esteem, that even then I would learn to be happy. However, I am under no apprehensions about that ; for though indolent, yet so far as an extremely delicate

¹ Vagrant mendicancy.

² A rational chat.

constitution permits, I am not lazy, and in many things, especially in tavern matters, I am a strict economist—not, indeed, for the sake of the money, but one of the principal parts in my composition is a kind of pride of stomach; and I scorn to fear the face of any man living—above everything, I abhor as hell the idea of sneaking in a corner to avoid a dun—possibly some pitiful, sordid wretch, whom in my heart I despise and detest. 'Tis this, and this alone, that endears economy to me. In the matter of books, indeed, I am very profuse. My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind—such as Shenstone, particularly his *Elegies*; Thomson; *Man of Feeling*¹—a book I prize next to the Bible; *Man of the World*; Sterne, especially his *Sentimental Journey*; Macpherson's *Ossian*, &c.; these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd, to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame—the man whose heart distends with benevolence to all the human race—he 'who can soar above this little scene of things'—can he descend to mind the paltry concerns about which the terræfilial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves? Oh how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor, insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them, reading a page or two of mankind, and 'catching the manners living as they rise,' whilst the men of business jostle me on every side as an idle encumbrance in their way. But I daresay I have by this time tired your patience; so I shall conclude with begging you to give Mrs Murdoch—not my compliments, for that is a mere common-place story, but my warmest, kindest wishes for her welfare—and accept of the same for yourself, from, dear sir, yours,

R. B.

Burns had formed the acquaintance of David Sillar, as we have seen, in the earlier part of 1781. Their friendship was of the most ardent kind. One can imagine the two russet-dressed lads taking their walks together, full of intimate, endlessly delightful conversation about their sweethearts, and about lasses in general, or, mayhap, at soberer moments, debating about the business for next club-night. Of the merry dancing-party which met on the July race-night in 1782, 'in honour of the society,' Mrs Begg is (1854) a survivor. She relates that Robert attended a dancing-school when at Lochlea, and she believes it was some time after the Kirkoswald visit, for a young cousin of theirs, Janet Brown, the daughter of the poet's entertainer there, was then residing with them, by way of completing the interchange of civilities. There could not well be any great objection on his father's part

¹ Of this work he used to say that he had worn out two copies by carrying it in his pocket.
—*Anonymous Life of Burns, Scots Magazine*, 1797.

to his acquiring this accomplishment, for Gilbert and the two eldest sisters, Agnes and Annabella, besides their ploughman, Willie Miller, all attended likewise. As a collateral circumstance not essential to the narrative, but characteristic—On a practising-ball occurring, Burns paid Willie's expenses, that he might have Janet Brown as a partner, so as to enable the bard to have as *his* partner some other lass who was then reigning in his affections. By and by, the Torbolton Club ball came on, a much more important affair; and, according to the record of the society, it went off most successfully. An accident led to Mrs Begg being present. Then a girl of eleven, attending the sewing-school at Torbolton, she was going home to Lochlea, when her sister Annie met her, and took her back to be a partner to Matthew Paterson, a member of the club, who had somehow lost his sweetheart, and was in despair on that account. In these little matters we get glimpses of the love-policies, the fears, the hopes, the triumphs, and the disasters, amidst which Burns describes himself as living at this period.

In imitation of Davie, who was a keen votary of the fiddle, Burns began, so early as 1781, to try to learn that instrument. When driven from the field by bad weather, he would while away a heavy hour in this way. Occasionally, too, he rose early in the morning, broke up the kitchen gathering-coal, and commenced practising; but this excited such discomposure in the family, as to render his fiddling anything but popular. He certainly never attained any proficiency either in this art or that of playing the German flute, which he subsequently attempted. It is amusing, nevertheless, to learn that he always kept up the idea that he was a kind of musician; and in a manuscript of his 'Epistle to Davie,' entitles him a brother fiddler, as well as brother poet. To despatch his musical accomplishments at once—he possessed a good ear, and much sensibility to sweet sounds, and could read printed airs with tolerable readiness, as well as write down an air in score. His voice, however, being essentially unmusical, he never could sing solo with any effect, and he always avoided displays of that kind.

The general life of Burns after his return from Irvine was as laborious as before. We have the authority of his brother Gilbert that it was frugal and temperate. Though social in his disposition, he never exceeded in his potations, and his personal expenses were not above seven pounds annually. We have scarcely any dates for his life or compositions throughout 1782; but it is

certain that during this period he composed both poems and songs. One of the poems took its rise in a simple incident related by his brother Gilbert. ‘He had, partly by way of frolic, bought a ewe and two lambs from a neighbour, and she was tethered in a field adjoining the house at Lochlea. He and I were going out with our teams, and our two younger brothers to drive for us, at mid-day, when Hugh Wilson, a curious-looking, awkward boy, clad in plaiding, came to us with much anxiety in his face, with the information that the ewe had entangled herself in the tether, and was lying in the ditch. Robert was much tickled with Hughoc’s appearance and posture on the occasion. Poor Mailie was set to rights; and when we returned from the plough in the evening, he repeated to me her Death and Dying Words pretty much in the way they now stand:’—

THE DEATH AND DYING WORDS OF POOR MAILIE,
THE AUTHOR’S ONLY PET YOWE:

AN UNCO MOURNFU’ TALE.

As Mailie and her lambs thegither,
Were ae day nibbling on the tether,
Upon her cloot she coost a hitch,
And ounre she warsled in the ditch:
There, groaning, dying, she did lie,
When Hughoc¹ he cam doytin’ by.

foot—loop
struggled

walking stupidly

Wi’ glowering een and lifted hands,
Poor Hughoc like a statue stands;
He saw her days were near-hand ended,
But, waes my heart! he could na mend it.
He gapèd wide, but naething spak—
At length poor Mailie silence brak.

staring

‘ Oh thou, whose lamentable face
Appears to mourn my woefu’ case!
My dying words attentive hear,
And bear them to my master dear.

‘ Tell him, if e’er again he keep
As muckle gear as buy a sheep,
Oh, bid him never tie them mair
Wi’ wicked strings o’ hemp or hair!

money

¹ A neighbour herd-callan. B.—In a copy of the poem in the poet’s handwriting, possessed by Miss Grace Aiken, Ayr, a more descriptive note is here given: ‘Hughoc was an odd, glowran, gapin’ callan, about three-fourths as wise as other folk.’

But ea' them out to park or hill,
And let them wander at their will ;
So may his flock increase, and grow
To scores o' lambs, and packs o' woo'.

‘ Tell him he was a master kin’,
And aye was guid to me and mine ;
And now my dying charge I gie him—
My helpless lambs I trust them wi’ him.

‘ Oh, bid him save their harmless lives
Frae dogs, and tod, and butchers’ knives ! foxes
But gie them guid cow-milk their fill,
Till they be fit to fend themsel ; provide for
And tent them duly, e’en and morn,
Wi’ teats o’ hay, and ripples o’ corn. handfuls

‘ And may they never learn the gaects ways
Of other vile, wanrestfu’ pets ; restless
To slink through slaps, and reave and steal
At stacks o’ peas, or stocks o’ kail.
So may they, like their great forbears, ancestors
For mony a year come through the shears :
So wives will gie them bits o’ bread,
And bairns greet for them when they’re dead.

‘ My poor toop-lamb, my son and heir,
Oh, bid him breed him up wi’ care ;
And if he live to be a beast,
To pit some havins in his breast ! manners

‘ And warn him, what I winna name,
To stay content wi’ yowes at hame ;
And no to rin and wear his cloots,
Like ither menseless, graceless brutes. senseless

‘ And neist my yowie, silly thing,
Gude keep thec frae a tether string ;
Oh, may thou ne’er forgather up
Wi’ ony blastit, moorland toop encounter
But aye keep mind to moop and mell
Wi’ sheep o’ credit like thyself. mump—associate

‘ And now, my bairns, wi’ my last breath
I lea’e my blessin’ wi’ you baith :
And when you think upo’ your mither,
Mind to be kin’ to ane anither.

'Now, honest Hughoc, dinna fail
To tell my master a' my tale;
And bid him burn his cursed tether,
And, for thy pains, thou's get my blether.'

This said, poor Mailie turned her head,
And closed her een amang the dead.

POOR MAILIE'S ELEGY.

Lament in rhyme, lament in prose,
Wi' saut tears trickling down your nose;
Our bardie's fate is at a close,
 Past a' remead;
The last sad cape-stane of his woes—
 Poor Mailie's dead!

It's no the loss o' warl's gear,
That could sae bitter draw the tear,
Or mak our bardie, dowic, wear
 The mourning weed:
He's lost a friend and neibor dear,
 In Mailie dead.

Through a' the toun she trotted by him;
A lang half-mile she could descry him;
Wi' kindly bleat, when she did spy him,
 She ran wi' speed:
A friend mair faithfu' ne'er cam nigh him
 Than Mailie dead.

I wat she was a sheep o' sense,
And could behave hersel wi' mensc: discretion
I'll say't she never brak a fence,
 Through thievish greed.
Our bardie, lanely, keeps the spence inner room
 Sin' Mailie's dead.

Or, if he wanders up the howe,
Her living image in her yowe,
Comes bleating to him, owre the knowe,
 For bits o' bread;
And down the briny pearls rowe
 For Mailie dead.

She was nae get o' moorland tips,
 Wi' tawted ket, and hairy hips,
 For her forbears were brought in ships
 Frae yont the Tweed :
 A bonnier flesh ne'er crossed the clips
 Than Mailie dead.¹

rams
 matted fleece

Wae worth the man wha first did shape
 That vile, wanchancie thing—a rapc !
 It makes guid fellows girm and gape,
 Wi' chokin' dread ;
 And Robin's bonnet wave wi' crape,
 For Mailie dead.

Oh a' ye bards on bonnie Doon !
 And wha on Ayr your chanters tune !
 Come, join the melancholious croon
 O' Robin's reed !
 His heart will never get aboon—
 His Mailie's dead !

moan

There is a homely humour in these pieces; but the hand of the bard had not yet acquired the full measure of its power or cunning. They are amongst the few pieces which the author's father was destined to see, and it is scarcely necessary to say that he admired the ability which they proved his son to possess.

To the same period may be ascribed some of his songs—as the following :—

JOHN BARLEYCORN—A BALLAD.²

There were three kings into the east,
 Three kings both great and high ;
 And they hae sworn a solemn oath
 John Barleycorn should dic.

They took a plough and ploughed him down,
 Put clods upon his head ;
 And they hae sworn a solemn oath,
 John Barleycorn was dead.

¹ Variation in original MS. :—

She was nae get o' runted rams,
 Wi' woo like goats, and legs like trams;
 She was the flower o' Fairly lambs,
 A famous breed ;
 Now Robin, greetin', chows the lams
 O' Mailie dead.

² This is an improvement upon an early song of probably English origin, of which Mr Robert Jameson has given a copy in his *Ballads* (2 vols. 8vo), which he obtained from a black-letter sheet in the Pepys Library, Cambridge.

But the cheerful spring came kindly on,
 And showers began to fall ;
 John Barleycorn got up again,
 And sore surprised them all.

The sultry suns of summer came,
 And he grew thick and strong ;
 His head weel armed wi' pointed spears,
 That no one should him wrong.

The sober autumn entered mild,
 When he grew wan and pale ;
 His bending joints and drooping head
 Shewed he began to fail.

His colour sickened more and more,
 He faded into age ;
 And then his enemies began
 To shew their deadly rage.

They 've taen a weapon, long and sharp,
 And cut him by the kneec ;
 Then tied him fast upon a cart,
 Like a rogue for forgerie.

They laid him down upon his back,
 And cudgelled him full sore ;
 They hung him up before the storm,
 And turned him o'er and o'er.

They fillèd up a darksome pit,
 With water to the brim ;
 They heavèd in John Barleycorn,
 There let him sink or swim.

They laid him out upon the floor
 To work him further wo ;
 And still, as signs of life appeared,
 They tossed him to and fro.

They wasted o'er a scorching flame
 The marrow of his bones ;
 But a miller used him worst of all,
 For he crushed him 'tween two stones.

And they hae taen his very heart's blood,
 And drunk it round and round ;
 And still the more and more they drank,
 Their joy did more abound.

John Barleycorn was a hero bold,
 Of noble enterprise;
For if you do but taste his blood,
 'Twill make your courage rise.

'Twill make a man forget his wo;
 'Twill heighten all his joy:
'Twill make the widow's heart to sing,
 Though the tear were in her eyc.

Then let us toast John Barleycorn,
 Each man a glass in hand;
And may his great posterity
 Ne'er fail in old Scotland!

The year 1783, and the early part of 1784, witnessed various love affairs of the poet, of which we have but an obscure account. One of these is solely indicated in the beautiful song of

MARY MORRISON.¹

Oh, Mary, at thy window be,
 It is the wished, the trysted hour!
Those smiles and glances let me see,
 That make the miser's treasure poor:
How blithely wad I bide the stoure,
 A weary slave frae sun to sun,
Could I the rich reward secure,
 The lovely Mary Morrison.

Yestreen when to the trembling string,
 The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
 I sat, but neither heard nor saw.
Though this was fair, and that was braw,
 And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed, and said amang them a':
 ‘Ye are na Mary Morrison.’

Oh, Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,
 Wha for thy sake wad gladly die?
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
 Whase only faut is loving thee?
If love for love thou wilt na gie,
 At least be pity to me shown;
A thought ungentle canna be
 The thought o' Mary Morrison.

¹ ‘Of all the productions of Burns, the pathetic and serious love-songs which he has left behind him in the manner of old ballads, are perhaps those which take the deepest and most lasting hold of the mind. Such are the lines to Mary Morrison, &c.’—HAZLITT.

Another finds record in a more luxurious strain :—

THE RIGS O' BARLEY.

TUNE—*Corn Rigs.*

It was upon a Lammas night,
When corn rigs are bonnie,
Beneath the moon's unclouded light,
I held awa to Annie :
The time flew by wi' tentless heed,
Till 'tween the late and early,
Wi' sma' persuasion she agreed
To see me through the barley.

The sky was blue, the wind was still,
The moon was shining clearly ;
I set her down wi' right good will
Amang the rigs o' barley ;
I ken't her heart was a' my ain ;
I loved her most sincerely ;
I kissed her owre and owre again
Amang the rigs o' barley.

I locked her in my fond embrace ;
Her heart was beating rarely :
My blessings on that happy placee,
Amang the rigs o' barley !
But by the moon and stars so bright,
That shone that hour so clearly !
She aye shall bless that happy night,
Amang the rigs o' barley.

I hae been blithe wi' comrades dear ;
I hae been merry drinkin' ;
I hae been joyfu' gath'rin' gear ;
I hae been happy thinkin' :
But a' the pleasures e'er I saw,
Though three times doubled fairly,
That happy night was worth them a',
Amang the rigs o' barley.

CHORUS.

Corn rigs, and barley rigs,
And corn rigs are bonnie :
I'll ne'er forget that happy night
Amang the rigs wi' Annie.

A friend of the late Mrs Anne Mirry, youngest daughter of a friend of Burns afterwards alluded to (p. 88), states that she regarded herself as the ‘Annie’ of this song, doubtless from her recognising in it, in connection with her own Christian name, some scene of nocturnal courtship in which she and the bard had been concerned. It is added, that on meeting Burns after the publication of the song, she told him that she had little expected to be celebrated by him in print; when he gaily said: ‘O ay, I was just wanting to give you a cast among the lave [rest].’ It was her lot to keep a house of entertainment in Cumnock during the greater part of her long life. She is described as a tall and masculine-looking woman. To the last, she would sing the song of the *Rigs o’ Barley*, and speak affectionately of the memory of the poet.

Of a third ditty we have also some particulars. It was a more serious and durable affair than either of the preceding. The heroine was a young woman acting as a superior servant in the house of Mr Montgomery of Coilsfield; hence she was called by Burns Montgomery’s Peggy. The poet’s acquaintance with her commenced in the same way as that of the Laird of Dumbiedykes with the lady whom he chose as his wife—that is, by their sitting in the same seat in church.¹ He himself tells us that he entered on a courtship, partly from a desire to shew his skill in the writing of *billet doux*—a kind of exercise in composition, of the dangers of which he, as an unreflecting poet, was of course quite unaware. By and by, as might have been expected, he came to write of the damsel in a somewhat fervent strain:—

MONTGOMERY’S PEGGY.

TUNE—*Gala Water*.

Although my bed were in yon muir,
Amang the heather, in my plaidie,
Yet happy, happy would I be,
Had I my dear Montgomery’s Peggy.

When o’er the hill beat surly storms,
And winter nights were dark and rainy;
I’d seek some dell, and in my arms
I’d shelter dear Montgomery’s Peggy.

¹ These particulars are from Mrs Begg.

Were I a baron proud and high,
 And horse and servants waiting ready,
 Then a 'twad gie o' joy to me,
 The sharin' t with Montgomery's Peggy.

When he at length began to make serious demonstrations, he found that the heart of Peggy had been for some time engaged to another, and it cost him, as he tells us, some heartaehes to get quit of the affair.

There is a fourth song, on the history of which a little obscurity rests. It is alluded to by the poet himself as 'the ebullition of that passion which ended the school business' at Kirkoswald. It appears, however, from the style of composition, to have been produced some years after the visit to Kirkoswald, when the acquaintance with the fair *fillette* who had overset his trigonometry was temporarily renewed. The date of this revived passion may be set down to the summer and autumn of 1784, for there is extant a brief letter written by him in November of that year to Thomas Orr of Park, in which he speaks of an affair of gallantry as embarrassing him, so that he was glad to have had 'Peggy' off his hand, this Peggy being, according to his sister, the same Margaret Thomson whom he had seen as a stripling at Kirkoswald. The song is one presenting some sweet descriptive lines, but not apparently calculated for popular singing :—

SONG COMPOSED IN AUGUST.

TUNE—*I had a Horse, I had nae mair.*

Now westlin winds and slaught'ring guns
 Bring autumn's pleasant weather ;
 The moorcock springs, on whirring wings,
 Amang the blooming heather :
 Now waving grain, wide o'er the plain,
 Delights the weary farmer ;
 And the moon shines bright, when I rove at night
 To muse upon my charmer.

The partridge loves the fruitful fells ;
 The plover loves the mountains ;
 The woodcock haunts the lonely dells ;
 The soaring hern the fountains :
 Through lofty groves the cushat roves,
 The path of man to shun it ;
 The hazel-bush o'erhangs the thrush,
 The spreading thorn the linnet.

heron
wood-pigeon

Thus every kind their pleasure find,
 The savage and the tender ;
 Some social join, and leagues combine ;
 Some solitary wander :
 Avaunt, away ! the cruel sway,
 Tyrannie man's dominion ;
 The sportsman's joy, the murdering cry,
 The fluttering gory pinion.

But Peggy, dear, the evening's clear,
 Thick flies the skimming swallow ;
 The sky is blue, the fields in view,
 All fading-green and yellow :
 Come, let us stray our gladsome way,
 And view the charms of nature ;
 The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,
 And every happy creature.

We 'll gently walk, and sweetly talk,
 Till the silent moon shine clearly ;
 I 'll grasp thy waist, and fondly prest,
 Swear how I love thee dearly :
 Not vernal showers to budding flowers,
 Not autumn to the farmer,
 So dear can be as thou to me,
 My fair, my lovely charmer !¹

In April of 1783, the poet opened a commonplaee-book with the following matters :—

OBSERVATIONS, HINTS, SONGS, SCRAPS OF POETRY, &c., by ROBERT BURNES—a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it, but was, however, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature, rational and irrational. As he was but little indebted to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinctured with his unpolished, rustic way of life; but as I believe they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature to see how a ploughman thinks and feels

¹ Mrs Begg remembers, about the time of her brother's attachment to Jean Armour, seeing this song freshly written out amongst his papers, with the name 'Jeanie' instead of 'Peggy,' and the word 'Armour' instead of 'charner,' at the end of the first and fifth verses. She therefore suspects that the poet has, through inadvertency, made a mistake in assigning this song to Miss Thomson. The present editor has not deemed himself justified on such a ground to reject so direct a statement of the poet himself. Perhaps he may have written the song for Miss Thomson, and only temporarily dethroned her name for the sake of a newer love. It seems next to impossible that Burns could have ever published the song with a change so calculated to debase its poetical value as the substitution of 'Armour' for 'charner.'

under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike, I believe, on all the species.

'There are numbers in the world who do not want sense to make a figure, so much as an opinion of their own abilities to put them upon recording their observations, and allowing them the same importance which they do to those which appear in print.'—SHENSTONE.

'Pleasing, when youth is long expired, to trace
The forms our pencil or our pen designed!
Such was our youthful air, and shape, and face,
Such the soft image of our youthful mind.'—*Ibid.*

April 1783.

Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and weakness it leads a young inexperienced mind into, still I think it in a great measure deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed upon it. If anything on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport, it is the feelings of green eighteen in the company of the mistress of his heart, when she repays him with an equal return of affection.

The next entry, bearing date August, makes the first allusion we have from him to his literary performances:—

August.

There is certainly some connection between love, and music, and poetry; and therefore I have always thought it a fine touch of nature, that passage in a modern love composition:

'As toward her cot he jogged along,
Her name was frequent in his song.'¹

For my own part, I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were in a manner the spontaneous language of my heart. The following composition was the first of my performances, and done at an early period of life, when my heart glowed with honest warm simplicity, unacquainted and uncorrupted with the ways of a wicked world. The performance is, indeed, very puerile and silly; but I am always pleased with it, as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest, and my tongue

¹ 'The sun was sleeping in the main,
Bright Cynthia silvered all the plain,
When Colin turned his team to rest,
And sought the lass he loved the best.
As toward her cot he jogged along,
Her name was frequent in his song;
But when his errand Dolly knew,
She said she'd something else to do,' &c.

sincere. The subject of it was a young girl, who really deserved all the praises I have bestowed on her. I not only had this opinion of her then, but I actually think so still, now that the spell is long since broken, and the enchantment at an end—

‘Oh once I loved a bonnie lass,’ &c.¹

Lest my works should be thought below criticism, or meet with a critic who perhaps will not look on them with so candid and favourable an eye, I am determined to criticise them myself.

The first distich of the first stanza is quite too much in the flimsy strain of our ordinary street-ballads; and, on the other hand, the second distich is too much in the other extreme. The expression is a little awkward, and the sentiment too serious. Stanza the second I am well pleased with, and I think it conveys a fine idea of that amiable part of the sex—the agreeables—or what, in our Scotch dialect, we call a sweet sonsy lass. The third stanza has a little of the flimsy turn in it, and the third line has rather too serious a cast. The fourth stanza is a very indifferent one; the first line is, indeed, all in the strain of the second stanza, but the rest is mere expletive. The thoughts in the fifth stanza come finely up to my favourite idea—a sweet sonsy lass: the last line, however, halts a little. The same sentiments are kept up with equal spirit and tenderness in the sixth stanza; but the second and fourth lines, ending with short syllables, hurt the whole. The seventh stanza has several minute faults; but I remember I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies, at the remembrance.

It has been remarked, that from the time of his coming in contact with the seaport characters of Irvine, the virtuous principles which he had acquired under the guidance of his father no longer held firm sway over him. It is not desirable to draw his frailties too broadly from the dread abode where, in common with his merits, they have gone to their repose; but it is interesting to find that, underneath the proud scorn which he used as a defence against vulgar criticism, he entertained the penitence worthy of a manly and humane heart. We trace this clearly in an entry of the commonplace-book—

September.

I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher, Mr Smith, in his excellent Theory of Moral Sentiments, that remorse is the most painful sentiment that can imbitter the human bosom. Any ordinary pitch of fortitude may bear up tolerably well under those calamities in the procurement of which we ourselves have had no hand; but when our own follies or crimes have made us miserable

¹ See ante, the song of *Handsome Nell*.

and wretched, to bear up with manly firmness, and, at the same time, have a proper penitential sense of our misconduct, is a glorious effort of self-command.

Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace,
 That press the soul, or wring the mind with anguish,
 Beyond comparison the worst are those
 That to our folly or our guilt we owe :
 In every other circumstance, the mind
 Has this to say : ‘ It was no deed of mine ; ’
 But when to all the evil of misfortune
 This sting is added : ‘ Blame thy foolish self ! ’
 Or worser far, the pangs of keen remorse ;
 The torturing, gnawing consciousness of guilt—
 Of guilt, perhaps, where we’ve involvéd others ;
The young, the innocent, who fondly loved us,
Nay, more, that very love their cause of ruin !
Oh burning hell ! in all thy store of torments
There’s not a keener lash !
 Lives there a man so firm, who, while his heart
 Feels all the bitter horrors of his crime,
 Can reason down its agonising throbs ;
 And, after proper purpose of amendment,
 Can firmly force his jarring thoughts to peace ?
 Oh happy ! happy ! enviable man !
 Oh glorious magnanimity of soul !

There is something like the same consciousness of staining errors in the next entry, which is dated March 1784 :—

I have often observed, in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the worst, has something good about him ; though very often nothing else than a happy temperament of constitution inclining him to this or that virtue. For this reason, no man can say in what degree any other person, besides himself, can be, with strict justice, called wicked. Let any of the strictest character for regularity of conduct among us, examine impartially how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but for want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstance intervening—how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped, because he was out of the line of such temptation ; and what often, if not always, weighs more than all the rest, how much he is indebted to the world’s good opinion, because the world does not know all—I say, *any man who can thus think, will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes, of mankind around him with a brother’s eye.*

I have often courted the acquaintance of that part of mankind commonly known by the ordinary phrase of blackguards, sometimes further than was consistent with the safety of my character ; those

who, by thoughtless prodigality or headstrong passions, have been driven to ruin. Though disgraced by follies, nay, sometimes stained with guilt, I have yet found among them, in not a few instances, some of the noblest virtues—magnanimity, generosity, disinterested friendship, and even modesty.¹

He here probably makes allusion to some of his Irvine companionships. The ensuing entries are near the same date, and highly illustrative of the feelings and temper of the young poet at this period:—

April.

As I am what the men of the world, if they knew such a man, would call a whimsical mortal, I have various sources of pleasure and enjoyment which are in a manner peculiar to myself, or some here and there such other out-of-the-way person. Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of winter, more than the rest of the year. This, I believe, may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast; but there is something even in the

‘Mighty tempest and the hoary waste,
Abrupt and deep, stretched o'er the buried earth,’

which raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favourable to everything great and noble. There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation in a cloudy winter-day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion; my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, ‘walks on the wings of the winds.’ In one of these seasons, just after a train of misfortunes, I composed the following:—

‘The wintry west extends his blast,’ &c.²

Shenstone finely observes, that love-verses, writ without any real passion, are the most nauseous of all conceits; and I have often thought that no man can be a proper critic of love-composition, except he himself, in one or more instances, have been a warm votary of this passion. As I have been all along a miserable dupe

¹ ‘I cannot say with the poet that I ever courted the acquaintance of blackguards; but though the labouring-man may select his friends, he cannot choose his work-fellows; and so I have frequently *come in contact* with blackguards, and have had opportunities of pretty thoroughly knowing them. And my experience of the class has been very much the reverse of that of Burns. I have usually found their virtues of a merely theatrie cast, and their vices real; much assumed generosity in some instances, but a callousness of feeling, and meanness of spirit, lying concealed beneath.’—HUGH MILLER: *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, 1854.

² See ante, *Winter, a Dirge*.

to love, and have been led into a thousand weaknesses and follies by it, for that reason I put the more confidence in my critical skill, in distinguishing foppery and conceit from real passion and nature. Whether the following song will stand the test I will not pretend to say, because it is my own: only I can say that it was at the time genuine from the heart:—

‘ Behind yon hills where Stinsiar flows,’ &c.¹

March 1784.

There was a certain period of my life that my spirit was broke by repeated losses and disasters, which threatened, and indeed effected, the utter ruin of my fortune. My body, too, was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a hypochondria, or confirmed melancholy. In this wretched state, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder, I hung my harp on the willow-trees, except in some lucid intervals, in one of which I composed the following:—

‘ Oh thou Great Being! what thou art,’ &c.²

April.

The following song is a wild rhapsody, miserably deficient in versification; but as the sentiments are the genuine feelings of my heart, for that reason I have a particular pleasure in conning it over:—

‘ My father was a farmer,’ &c.³

April.

I think the whole species of young men may be naturally enough divided into two grand classes, which I shall call the *grave* and the *merry*; though, by the by, these terms do not with propriety enough express my ideas. The grave I shall cast into the usual division of those who are goaded on by the love of money, and those whose darling wish is to make a figure in the world. The merry are the men of pleasure of all denominations; the jovial lads who have too much fire and spirit to have any settled rule of action, but, without much deliberation, follow the strong impulses of nature: the thoughtless, the careless, the indolent—in particular, he who, with a happy sweetness of natural temper, and a cheerful vacancy of thought, steals through life—generally, indeed, in poverty and obscurity; but poverty and obscurity are only evils to him who can sit gravely down and make a repining comparison between his own situation and that of others; and lastly, to grace the quorum, such are, generally, those whose heads are capable of all the towerings of genius, and whose hearts are warmed with all the delicacy of feeling.

There cannot, of course, be a doubt that in the latter paragraph the Ayrshire peasant meant to delineate his own character.

In the early part of 1783, William Burness began to shew

¹ See ante, *My Nannie, O.*

² See ante.

³ See ante.

symptoms of a speedy release from the coil of mortal life, to the infinite grief of his whole family, among whom he was ever regarded as something almost superior to human imperfection. Robert is found in June writing on this distressing subject to his cousin, Mr Burness, writer, Montrose, and at the same time giving a sensible this-world-like sketch of the state of country matters at that time in Ayrshire :—

LOCHLEA, 21st June 1783.

DEAR SIR—My father received your favour of the 10th current, and as he has been for some months very poorly in health, and is, in his own opinion (and indeed in almost everybody's else), in a dying condition, he has only, with great difficulty, written a few farewell lines to each of his brothers-in-law. For this melancholy reason I now hold the pen for him, to thank you for your kind letter, and to assure you, sir, that it shall not be my fault if my father's correspondence in the north die with him. My brother writes to John Caird, and to him I must refer you for the news of our family.

I shall only trouble you with a few particulars relative to the wretched state of this country. Our markets are exceedingly high—oatmeal, 17*d.* and 18*d.* per peck, and not to be got even at that price. We have indeed been pretty well supplied with quantities of white peas from England and elsewhere, but that resource is likely to fail us, and what will become of us then, particularly the very poorest sort, Heaven only knows. This country, till of late, was flourishing incredibly in the manufacture of silk, lawn, and carpet-weaving; and we are still carrying on a good deal in that way, but much reduced from what it was. We had also a fine trade in the shoe way, but now entirely ruined, and hundreds driven to a starving condition on account of it. Farming is also at a very low ebb with us. Our lands, generally speaking, are mountainous and barren; and our landholders, full of ideas of farming gathered from the English and the Lothians, and other rich soils in Scotland, make no allowance for the odds of the quality of land, and consequently stretch us much beyond what in the event we will be found able to pay. We are also much at a loss for want of proper methods in our improvements of farming. Necessity compels us to leave our old schemes, and few of us have opportunities of being well informed in new ones. In short, my dear sir, since the unfortunate beginning of this American war, and its as unfortunate conclusion, this country has been, and still is, decaying very fast. Even in higher life, a couple of our Ayrshire noblemen, and the major part of our knights and squires, are all insolvent. A miserable job of a Douglas, Heron, & Co.'s Bank, which no doubt you have heard of, has undone numbers of them; and imitating English and French, and other foreign luxuries and fopperies, has ruined as many more. There is

a great trade of smuggling carried on along our coasts, which, however destructive to the interests of the kingdom at large, certainly enriches this corner of it, but too often at the expense of our morals. However, it enables individuals to make, at least for a time, a splendid appearance; but Fortune, as is usual with her when she is uncommonly lavish of her favours, is generally even with them at the last; and happy were it for numbers of them if she would leave them no worse than when she found them.

My mother sends you a small present of a cheese; 'tis but a very little one, as our last year's stock is sold off. . . .

I shall conclude this long letter with assuring you that I shall be very happy to hear from you, or any of our friends in your country, when opportunity serves.

My father sends you, probably for the last time in this world, his warmest wishes for your welfare and happiness; and my mother and the rest of the family desire to enclose their kind compliments to you, Mrs Burness, and the rest of your family, along with those of, dear sir, your affectionate cousin,

R. B.

Mrs Begg's recollections of her father refer almost exclusively to his later years, when he had fallen into delicate health; but they are sufficiently distinct. The good old man seems to have impressed his children with feelings akin to devotion towards him. It was the simple effect of his infinite tenderness towards them, and of the benevolent feelings which animated his entire conduct in life. Broken down as he was in constitution, he sustained his natural and habitual cheerfulness. He was always endeavouring to make his young ones happy by the promotion of innocent mirth; never forgetting at the same time any opportunity that occurred of awakening reflection, and leading them to habits of self-culture. Mrs Begg never saw him angry but twice: once at a young lad for wasting some hay, when he had just returned weary and irritated from an interview about the unfortunate law-suit; the other time, when an old man, to whom he had shewn much kindness, told something that was false regarding him. On this latter occasion, an altercation took place in the kitchen, and Mrs Burness gave her husband a reproachful look. He sternly said: 'There must be no gloomy looks here.' A solitary example of severity towards his wife which, on retrospect, gave much pain to all concerned. Mrs Burness reported, that he had never administered what might truly be called a beating to any of their children but once to the eldest girl for obstinacy, while he was teaching her to read; and it had been attended with a good effect upon the child's temper.

At Lochlea, Mrs Begg's main occupation was one suited to her

tender years—that of tending the cattle in the fields. Her father would often visit her, sit down by her side, and tell her the names of the various grasses and wild-flowers, as if to lose no opportunity of imparting instruction. When it thundered, she was sure he would soon come to her, because he knew that on such occasions she was apt to suffer much from terror. These are simple and homely traits; but they help to fill up the sketch which Murdoch and others have given of one who seems to have been a model of humble goodness.

The worthy man died on the 13th of February 1784, leaving his family in the midst of a harassing litigation about the conditions of the lease of their farm. Mrs Begg remembers being at his bedside that morning, with no other company besides her brother Robert. Seeing her cry bitterly at the thought of parting with her dear father, he endeavoured to speak, but could only murmur a few words of comfort, such as might be suitable to a child, concluding with an injunction to her ‘to walk in virtue’s paths, and shun every vice.’ After a pause, he said there was one of his family for whose future conduct he feared. He repeated the same expression, when the young poet came up and said: ‘Oh, father, is it me you mean?’ The old man said it was. Robert turned to the window, with the tears streaming down his manly cheeks, and his bosom swelling as if it would burst from the very restraint he put upon himself. The father had marked his son—

‘ Misled by fancy’s meteor ray,
By passion driven;’

and the son knew and repented his faults, though he lacked the power of correcting them. A day of virtuous reproof on the one side, and melting penitence on the other, could not have expressed more upon the subject.

It was thought proper to carry the remains of the old man to the scene of his early married life, although at some expense and inconvenience, as it was fully eight miles distant. The coffin was, according to an old fashion, arranged between two bearing-horses, placed one after the other, and thus, followed by relations and neighbours on horseback, it was carried to Alloway Kirkyard. There a small headstone over his grave was inscribed with the following stanzas by his son:—

Oh ye whose cheek the tear of pity stains,
Draw near with pious rev’rence and attend !
Here lie the loving husband’s dear remains,
The tender father, and the gen’rous friend,

The pitying heart that felt for human wo ;
 The dauntless heart that feared no human pride ;
 The friend of man, to vice alone a foe ;
 ‘For even his failings leaned to virtue’s side.’¹

The poet also expressed his feelings on this melancholy occasion in a letter to Mr Burness of Montrose :—

LOCHLEA, 17th February 1784.

DEAR COUSIN—I would have returned you my thanks for your kind favour of the 13th of December sooner, had it not been that I waited to give you an account of that melancholy event which, for some time past, we have from day to day expected.

On the 13th current I lost the best of fathers. Though, to be sure, we have had long warning of the impending stroke, still the feelings of nature claim their part, and I cannot recollect the tender endearments and parental lessons of the best of friends and ablest of instructors, without feeling what perhaps the calmer dictates of reason would partly condemn.

I hope my father’s friends in your country will not let their connection in this place die with him. For my part I shall ever with pleasure, with pride, acknowledge my connection with those who were allied by the ties of blood and friendship to a man whose memory I shall ever honour and revere.

I expect, therefore, my dear sir, you will not neglect any opportunity of letting me hear from you, which will very much oblige, my dear cousin, yours sincerely,

R. B.

¹ Goldsmith.



Burns's House at Irvine.

M O S S G I E L.

1784—1786.

As a refuge for the family in case of the Lochlea landlord proceeding to extremities, Burns and his brother had engaged, at Martinmas 1783, another farm, only two or three miles distant from Lochlea, but in a different parish (Mauchline). This was the Mossiel which has become connected with so many of the most noted facts in his history. It consisted of 118 acres of cold clayey soil, lying in a bare upland, little more than a mile from the village of Mauchline. It was only by ranking as creditors of their father, for the arrears of wages due on account of their respective labours, that the two sons and two grown daughters of the late William Burness rescued from the grip of the law any portion of their Lochlea stocking wherewith to recommence business in this new situation. They set about this duty with renewed resolutions of unsparing exertion and unsparing self-denial; and if circumstances had been at all favourable, they might have had little to complain of.

The poet says, in his autobiographical memoir :

I entered on this farm with a full resolution, *Come, go to, I will be wise!* I read farming-books—I calculated crops—I attended markets—and, in short, in spite of *the devil, and the world, and the flesh*, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second, from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned, *like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*

The last extract from the letter of Gilbert Burns regarding his brother's life broke off with an affirmation of the sobriety of the poet's habits in his earlier years. He goes on thus : 'A stronger proof of the general sobriety of his conduct need not be required than what I am about to give. During the whole of the time we lived in the farm of Lochlea with my father, he allowed my brother and me such wages for our labour as he gave to other labourers, as a part of which, every article of our clothing, manufactured in the family, was regularly accounted for. When my father's affairs drew near a crisis, Robert and I took the farm of Mossiel, consisting of 118 acres, at the rent of £90 per annum

(the farm on which I live at present), from Mr Gavin Hamilton, as an asylum for the family in case of the worst. It was stocked by the property and individual savings of the whole family, and was a joint concern among us. Every member of the family was allowed ordinary wages for the labour he performed on the farm. My brother's allowance and mine was £7 per annum each. And during the whole time this family concern lasted, which was for four years, as well as during the preceding period at Lochlea, his expenses never in any one year exceeded his slender income. As I was intrusted with the keeping of the family accounts, it is not possible that there can be any fallacy in this statement in my brother's favour. His temperance and frugality were everything that could be wished.'

The two brothers entered upon their farm of Mossgiel for the crop of 1784, commencing their residence there in March. The *steading* furnished a neater residence for the family than they had ever before enjoyed, for it had been built to serve as a sort of country retreat for the family of Mr Gavin Hamilton, writer in Mauchline, who, as first tenant from the proprietor, the Earl of Loudoun, had sublet the farm to Burns. We have the poet's own declaration, that he was now truly anxious to do well in the world. He says: 'I read farming-books—I calculated crops—I attended markets.' 'Come, go to,' he cried, 'I will be wise.' Allan Cunningham speaks with knowledge on this part of the poet's history. 'Burns,' he says, 'was attentive as far as ploughing, sowing, harrowing, reaping, thrashing, winnowing, and selling went: he did all this by a sort of mechanical impulse; but success in farming demands more. The farmer should know what is doing in his way in the world around; he must learn to anticipate demand; and, in short, to *time* everything. But he who pens an ode on his sheep when he should be driving them forth to pasture—who sees visions on his way home from market, and makes rhymes on them—who writes an ode on the horse he is about to yoke, and a ballad on the girl who shews the brightest eyes among his reapers—has no chance of ever growing opulent, or of purchasing the field on which he toils.' Gilbert was cast in a more worldly mould than his gifted brother, and he took immediate charge of everything; for Robert, it is said, when addressed about a business-matter, always turned it off with, 'Oh, talk to my brother about that.' But neither does it appear that Gilbert, though a sagacious and upright man, was a good farmer. A landlord, it must be admitted, is apt to take derogatory views

of an unsuccessful tenant; but yet it is significant that Mr Alexander, subsequently proprietor of Mossgiel, used to speak of Gilbert as more a man of theory than of practical address and activity. It is not, therefore, surprising that this new speculation of the poet proved no more fortunate than any of its predecessors. Dr Currie gives a curious illustration of the causes of Burns's failure as a man of the world. 'At the time,' he says, 'that our poet took the resolution of becoming *wise*, he procured a little book of blank paper, with the purpose, expressed on the first page, of making farming-memorandums. These farming-memorandums are curious enough, and a specimen may gratify the reader.' He then presents the following snatches of verse:¹—

EXTEMPORE.

Oh why the deuce should I repine,
And be an ill foreboder?
I'm twenty-three, and five feet nine,
I'll go and be a sodger!

I gat some gear wi' mickle care,
I held it weel thegither;
But now it's gane, and something mair—
I'll go and be a sodger!

Oh leave novels, ye Mauchline belles,
Ye're safer at your spinning-wheel;
Such witching books are baited hooks
For rakish rooks like Rob Mossgiel. . . .

Beware a tongue that's smoothly hung,
A heart that warmly seems to feel;
That feeling heart but acts a part,
'Tis rakish art in Rob Mossgiel. . . .

In the course of the summer 1784, the health of the poet gave way to a serious extent. The movements of the heart were affected, and he became liable to fainting fits, particularly in the night-time. As a remedy, he was obliged to have recourse to the cold-bath. A barrel of water stood near his bedside, and into this he was obliged to plunge when threatened with an access of

¹ The date, April 1782, is prefixed to the extempore verses by Currie, but perhaps only under a presumption arising from the time of life indicated. Or it may be that Burns started his memorandum-book not exactly at the time of this particular resolution.

his ailment. At the same time, an overconfiding maiden was about to afford proof of the extent to which his father's fears were just—the only consolation in the case being, that that excellent man had gone where goodness no longer suffers for the guilt of those it loves. The youthful bard, feeling that death hovered over him, and reflecting with compunction on the errors partly involved in the cause of his malady, was for a time under very serious impressions. He at this time wrote what he calls in his Commonplace-book ‘a Prayer when fainting fits and other alarming symptoms of a pleurisy, or some other dangerous disorder which still threatens me, first put nature on the alarm.’ It was subsequently published under the more simple name of

A PRAYER IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH.

Oh thou unknown, Almighty Cause
 Of all my hope and fear!
 In whose dread presence, ere an hour,
 Perhaps I must appear!

If I have wandered in those paths
 Of life I ought to shun ;
 As something, loudly, in my breast,
 Remonstrates I have done ;

Thou know'st that Thou hast formèd me
 With passions wild and strong ;
 And listening to their witching voice
 Has often led me wrong.

Where human weakness has come short,
 Or frailty stept aside,
 Do thou, All-good ! for such thou art,
 In shades of darkness hide.

Where with intention I have erred,
 No other plea I have,
 But, Thou art good ; and goodness still
 Delighteth to forgive.

He also wrote—

STANZAS ON THE SAME OCCASION.

Why am I loth to leave this earthly scene ?
 Have I so found it full of pleasing charms ?
 Some drops of joy with draughts of ill between :
 Some gleams of sunshine 'mid renewing storms :

Is it departing pangs my soul alarms?
 Or death's unlovely, dreary, dark abode?
 For guilt, for guilt, my terrors are in arms;
 I tremble to approach an angry God,
 And justly smart beneath his sin-avenging rod.

 Fain would I say, ‘Forgive my foul offence!’
 Fain promise never more to disobey;
 But should my Author health again dispense,
 Again I might desert fair Virtue’s way:
 Again in Folly’s path might go astray;
 Again exalt the brute, and sink the man;
 Then how should I for heavenly mercy pray,
 Who act so counter heavenly mercy’s plan?
 Who sin so oft have mourned, yet to temptation ran?

Oh Thou, great Governor of all below!
 If I may darc a lifted eyc to Thee,
 Thy nod can make the tempest cease to blow,
 Or still the tumult of the raging sea:
 With that controlling power assist even me
 Those headlong furious passions to confine;
 For all unfit I feel my powers to be,
 To rule their torrent in the allowed line;
 Oh, aid me with Thy help, Omnipotence Divine!¹

It is strange that we so often hear of the faults of Burns, and of the defences advanced by his friends, and that so little notice has been taken of what at once attests the reality of those faults, and most powerfully pleads their pardon—the deep, unostentatious penitence of the bard himself.

To the same period I am disposed to refer two translations of psalms, which appeared in the Edinburgh edition of his poems:—

THE FIRST PSALM.

The man, in life wherever placed,
 Hath happiness in store,
 Who walks not in the wicked’s way,
 Nor learns their guilty lore!

Nor from the seat of scornful pride
 Casts forth his eyes abroad,
 But with humility and awe
 Still walks before his God.

¹ In Mr Dick’s MS. is apparently an earlier copy of this poem, containing some variations expressive of deeper contrition than what here appears. After ‘Again I might desert fair Virtue’s way,’ comes, ‘Again by passion would be led astray.’ The second line of the last stanza is, ‘If one so black with crimes dare on thee call.’

That man shall flourish like the trees
 Which by the streamlets grow;
 The fruitful top is spread on high,
 And firm the root below.

But he whose blossom buds in guilt,
 Shall to the ground be cast,
 And, like the rootless stubble, tost
 Before the sweeping blast.

For why? that God the good adore
 Hath given them peace and rest,
 But hath decreed that wicked men
 Shall ne'er be truly blest.

THE FIRST SIX VERSES OF THE NINETIETH PSALM.

Oh Thou, the first, the greatest friend
 Of all the human race!
 Whose strong right hand has ever been
 Their stay and dwelling-place!

Before the mountains heaved their heads
 Beneath Thy forming hand,
 Before this ponderous globe itself
 Arose at Thy command;

That Power which raised and still upholds
 This universal frame,
 From countless, unbeginning time,
 Was ever still the same.

Those mighty periods of years
 Which seem to us so vast,
 Appear no more before Thy sight
 Than yesterday that's past.

Thou giv'st the word: Thy creature, man
 Is to existence brought;
 Again Thou say'st: 'Ye sons of men,
 Return ye into nought!'

Thou layest them with all their cares
 In everlasting sleep;
 As with a flood Thou tak'st them off
 With overwhelming sweep.

They flourish like the morning flower,
 In beauty's pride arrayed;
 But long ere night, cut down, it lies
 All withered and decayed.

Probably the penitence of the poet lasted as long as his illness. We have to make a somewhat abrupt transition in turning from it to his acquaintance with a certain rough-witted person named John Rankine, who leased the farm of Adamhill, not far from Lochlea. Rankine was a prince of boon-companions, and mingled a good deal in the society of the neighbouring gentry, but was too free a liver to be on good terms with the stricter order of the clergy. Burns and he had taken to each other, no doubt in consequence of their community of feeling and thinking on many points. The youngest daughter of Rankine had a recollection of the poet's first visit to their house at Adamhill, and related that, on his coming into the parlour, he made a circuit, to avoid a small carpet in the centre, having probably at that time no acquaintance with carpets, and too great a veneration for them to tread upon them with his ploughman's shoes. Rankine amused the fancy of Burns by a trick which he played off upon a guest of rigid professions, which ended in filling the holy man thoroughly drunk. A less questionable specimen of his clever ambusading talents was presented in a dream which he represented himself as having had, and of which Allan Cunningham gives an account.¹

In an epistle which Burns wrote about this time to Rankine, enclosing a batch of his poems, allusion is made to some of these circumstances :—

EPISTLE TO JOHN RANKINE.

Oh rough, rude, ready-witted Rankine,
The wale o' cocks for fun and drinkin'!
There's mony godly folks are thinkin',
Your dreams and tricks
Will send you, Korah-like, a sinkin',
Straught to Auld Nick's.

choice

¹ ‘Lord K——, it is said, was in the practice of calling all his familiar acquaintances *brutes*. “Well, ye brute, how are ye to-day?” was his usual mode of salutation. Once in company, his lordship, having indulged in this rudeness more than his wont, turned to Rankine and exclaimed: “Brute, are ye dumb? Have ye no queer sly story to tell us?” “I have nae story,” said Rankine; “but last night I had an odd dream.” “Out with it by all means,” said the other. “Well,” said Rankine, “I dreamed I was dead, and that for keeping other than good company on earth, I was sent down stairs. When I knocked at the low door, wha should open it but the deil; he was in a rough humour, and said: ‘Wha may ye be, and what’s your name?’ ‘My name,’ quoth I, ‘is John Rankine, and my dwelling-place was Adamhill.’ ‘Gae wa’ wi’ ye,’ quoth Satan, ‘ye canna be here; ye’re ane o’ Lord K——’s brutes—hell’s fou o’ them already.’” This sharp rebuke, it is said, polished for the future his lordship’s speech.—Cunningham’s edition of Burns.

Ye hae sae mony cracks and cants,
 And in your wicked, drucken rants,
 Ye mak a devil o' the saunts,
 And fill them fou ;
 And then their failings, flaws, and wants,
 Are a' seen through.

Hypocrisy, in mercy spare it !
 That holy robe, oh dinna tear it !
 Spare't for their sakes wha often wear it,
 The lads in black !
 But your curst wit, when it comes near it,
 Rives't aff their back.

Tears

Think, wicked sinner, wha ye're skaithing,
 It's just the blue-gown badge and claithing¹
 O' saunts ; tak that, ye lea'e them naithing
 To ken them by,
 Frae ony unregenerate heathen
 Like you or I.

I've sent you here some rhyming ware,
 A' that I bargained for, and mair ;
 Sae, whan ye hae an hour to spare,
 I will expect
 Yon sang,² ye'll sen't wi' canny care,
 And no neglect.

thoughtful

Though, faith, sma' heart hae I to sing !
 My muse dow scarcely spread her wing ;
 I've played mysel a bonnie spring,
 And danced my fill ;
 I'd better gaen and sair't the king
 At Bunker's Hill.

can

served

'Twas ae night lately, in my fun,
 I gaed a roving wi' the gum,
 And brought a paitrick to the grun',
 A bonnie hen,
 And as the twilight was begun,
 Thought nane wad ken.

¹ Alluding to a blue uniform and badge worn by a select number of privileged beggars in Scotland, usually called King's Bedesmen. Edie Ochiltree, in the *Antiquary*, is an example of the corps.

² A song he had promised the author.—*E.*

The poor wee thing was little hurt;
 I straikit it a wee for sport,
 Ne'er thinking they wad fash me for 't; trouble
 But deil-ma-care!
 Somebody tells the poacher-court
 The hale affair.

Some auld used hands had taen a note
 That sic a hen had got a shot;
 I was suspected for the plot,
 I scorned to lie;
 So gat the whistle o' my groat,
 And pay't the fee. . . .

As soon's the cloaking-time is by,
 And the wee pouts begun to ery,
 L—, I'se haec sportin' by and by,
 For my gowd guinea,
 Though I should hunt the buckskin kye
 For't in Virginia. . . .

It puts me aye as mad's a hare;
 So I can rhyme and write nae mair,
 But pennyworths again is fair,
 When time's expedient:
 Meanwhile I am, respected sir,
 Your most obedient.

In August of this year, the poet resumes in his Commonplace-book the subject broken off in the last note:—

August.

The foregoing was to have been an elaborate dissertation on the various species of men; but as I cannot please myself in the arrangement of my ideas, I must wait till further experience and nicer observation throw more light on the subject. In the meantime, I shall set down the following fragment, which, as it is the genuine language of my heart, will enable anybody to determine which of the classes I belong to:—

GREEN GROW THE RASHES.

TUNE—*Green grow the Rashes.*

There's nought but care on every hand,
 In every hour that passes, O :
 What signifies the life o' man,
 An 'twere na for the lasses, O.

CHORUS.

Green grow the rashes, O !
 Green grow the rashes, O !
 The sweetest hours that e'er I spend
 Are spent amang the lasses, O.

The warly race may riches chase,
 And riches still may fly them, O ;
 And though at last they catch them fast,
 Their hearts can ne'er enjoy them, O.

worldly

Gie me a canny hour at e'en,
 My arms about my dearie, O ;
 And warly cares, and warly men,
 May a' gae tapsalteerie, O.

happy

For you sae douce, ye sneer at this,
 Ye're nought but senseless asses, O :
 The wisest man the warl' e'er saw,
 He dearly loved the lasses, O.

grave

Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears
 Her noblest work she classes, O :
 Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
 And then she made the lasses, O.¹

topsy-turvy

As the grand end of human life is to cultivate an intercourse with that Being to whom we owe life, with every enjoyment that renders life delightful, and to maintain an integrative conduct towards our fellow-creatures—that so by forming piety and virtue into habit, we may be fit members for that society of the pious and the good which reason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave—I do not see that the turn of mind and pursuits of such a one as the above verses describe; one who spends the hours and thoughts which the vocations of the day can spare, with Ossian, Shakspeare, Thomson, Shenstone, Sterne, &c.; or, as the maggot takes him, a gun, a fiddle, or a song to make or mend; and at all times some heart's-dear

¹ In this song Burns made an improvement upon an ancient homely ditty to the same air. It has been pointed out that the last admirable verse is formed upon a conceit, which was put into print long before the days of Burns, in a comedy entitled *Cupid's Whirligig*, published in 1607. The passage in the comedy is an apostrophe to the female sex, as follows:—

'Oh woman——— since we
 Were made before ye, should we not love and
 Admire ye as the last, and therefore perfect' st work
 Of Nature? Man was made when Nature was
 But an apprentice, but woman when she
 Was a skilful mistress of her art.'

It might be presumed that Burns had no chance of seeing the old play; but it appears that the passage has been transferred into a book which was not very scarce in his time—namely, *The British Muse, a Collection of Thoughts*, by Thomas Hayward, Gent. 4 vols. London, 1738.

bonnie lass in view—I say I do not see that the turn of mind and pursuits of such a one are in the least more inimical to the sacred interests of piety and virtue, than the even lawful bustling and straining after the world's riches and honours : and I do not see but he may gain heaven as well—which, by the by, is no mean consideration—who steals through the vale of life amusing himself with every little flower that fortune throws in his way, as he who, straining straight forward, and perhaps spattering all about him, gains some of life's little eminences, where, after all, he can only see and be seen a little more conspicuously than what, in the pride of his heart, he is apt to term the poor, indolent devil he has left behind him.

This is evidently an attempt to reconcile himself to the choice which powerful impulse was forcing upon him, of the lyre instead of the plough.

For some years before leaving Lochlea, Burns had joined a fraternity of freemasons who met in a small public-house in the village of Torbolton.¹ His generous and social temper disposed him to take a warm part in their festive proceedings ; and his witty intelligent conversation made him speedily ascend to a leading-place in the lodge.² His name occurs in their books as Deputemaster, July 27, 1784, and in this capacity he signs minutes for two or three years thereafter. According to the report of old associates at the village, he was ‘so keen a mason, that he would hold lodges for the admission of new members in his own house,’ and when removed to Mossiel, four miles distant, he continued to attend regularly. All this is to be attributed to the social spirit alone, for Burns was not a convivialist for the sake of the gross indulgences involved in that character. Any bacchanalianism which appears in his verses was not from the heart, as his ravings on amatory subjects usually are. He was here merely the literary medium of a recognised common sentiment. Such a character appears, we think, conspicuously in a piece referrible to the Torbolton festivities :—

THE CURE FOR ALL CARE.

TUNE—*Prepare, my dear Brethren, to the Tavern let's fly.*

No churchman am I for to rail and to write,
No statesman nor soldier to plot or to fight,
No sly man of business contriving a snare—
For a big-bellied bottle's the whole of my care.

¹ Burns was made as a mason by Alexander Wood, tailor in Torbolton. The first mason he himself made was Matthew Hall, a noted musician, long after resident in Newton-upon-Ayr.—*Ballads and Songs of Ayrshire.*

² See Appendix, No. 5.

The peer I don't envy, I give him his bow ;
 I scorn not the peasant, though ever so low ;
 But a club of good fellows, like those that are here,
 And a bottle like this, are my glory and care.

Here passes the squire on his brother—his horse ;
 There centum per centum, the eit with his purse ;
 But see you The Crown, how it waves in the air !
 There a big-bellied bottle still eases my care.

The wife of my bosom, alas ! she did die ;
 For sweet consolation to church I did fly ;
 I found that old Solomon provèd it fair,
 That a big-bellied bottle's a cure for all care.

I once was persuaded a venture to make ;
 A letter informed me that all was to wreck ;—
 But the pursy old landlord just waddled up stairs,
 With a glorious bottle that ended my cares.

' Life's cares, they are comforts' ¹—a maxim laid down
 By the bard, what d'ye call him, that wore the black gown ;
 And, faith, I agree with th' old prig to a hair ;
 For a big-bellied bottle's a heaven of care.

ADDED IN A MASON LODGE.

Then fill up a bumper, and make it o'erflow,
 And honours masonic prepare for to throw ;
 May every true brother of th' compass and square
 Have a big-bellied bottle when harassed with care !

This appears as a mere exercise in verse-making, on the model of some of the jolly ditties to be found in the song-books of the last century. One somewhat like it occurs in the *Charmer* (1751), in which the poet excuses himself for the desertion of his Chloe by pointing to the superior charms of wine—one verse being :

' She, too, might have poisoned the joy of my life,
 With nurses and babies, and squalling and strife ;
 But my wine neither nurses nor babies can bring,
 And a big-bellied bottle's a mighty good thing.'

¹ Young.

TO MR JAMES BURNES, MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, August 1784.

We have been surprised with one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the moral world which I daresay has happened in the course of this half-century. We have had a party of [the] Presbytery [of] Relief, as they call themselves, for some time in this country. A pretty thriving society of them has been in the burgh of Irvine for some years past, till, about two years ago, a Mrs Buchan from Glasgow came, and began to spread some fanatical notions of religion among them, and in a short time made many converts; and among others their preacher, Mr White, who, upon that account, has been suspended and formally deposed by his brethren. He continued, however, to preach in private to his party, and was supported, both he and their spiritual mother, as they affect to call old Buchan, by the contributions of the rest, several of whom were in good circumstances; till, in spring last, the populace rose and mobbed Mrs Buchan, and put her out of the town; on which all her followers voluntarily quitted the place likewise, and with such precipitation, that many of them never shut their doors behind them. One left a washing on the green, another a cow bellowing at the crib without food, or anybody to mind her; and after several stages, they are fixed at present in the neighbourhood of Dumfries. Their tenets are a strange jumble of enthusiastic jargon; among others, she pretends to give them the Holy Ghost by breathing on them, which she does with postures and practices that are scandalously indecent. They have likewise disposed of all their effects, and hold a community of goods, and live nearly an idle life, carrying on a great farce of pretended devotion in barns and woods, where they lodge and lie altogether, and hold likewise a community of women, as it is another of their tenets that they can commit no moral sin. I am personally acquainted with most of them, and I can assure you the above mentioned are facts.

This, my dear sir, is one of the many instances of the folly of leaving the guidance of sound reason and common sense in matters of religion.

Whenever we neglect or despise these sacred monitors, the whimsical notions of a perturbated brain are taken for the immediate influences of the Deity, and the wildest fanaticism, and the most inconstant absurdities, will meet with abettors and converts. Nay, I have often thought that the more out-of-the-way and ridiculous the fancies are, if once they are sanctified under the sacred name of religion, the unhappy mistaken votaries are the more firmly glued to them.

R. B.

We must now proceed with the entries in his Commonplace-book :—

EGOTISMS FROM MY OWN SENSATIONS.

May 8 [1784?]

I don't well know what is the reason of it, but somehow or other, though I am, when I have a mind, pretty generally beloved, yet I never could get the art of commanding respect. I imagine it is owing to my being deficient in what Sterne calls 'that understrapping virtuc of discretion.' I am so apt to a *lapsus linguae*, that I sometimes think the character of a certain great man I have read of somewhere is very much *apropos* to myself—that he was a compound of great talents and great folly. N.B.—To try if I can discover the causes of this wretched infirmity, and, if possible, to mend it.

Between this entry and the next, which is dated August, he inserts a few snatches of verse, which possibly, however, are the production of a period somewhat later :—

Though cruel Fate should bid us part,
As far's the Pole and Line,
Her dear idea round my heart
Should tenderly entwine.

Though mountains frown and deserts howl,
And oceans roar between ;
Yet, dearer than my deathless soul,
I still would love my Jean.

One night as I did wander,
When corn begins to shoot,
I sat me down to ponder,
Upon an auld tree-root.

Auld Ayr ran by before me,
And bickered to the seas,
A cushat crooded o'er me,
That echoed through the braces.

raced
wood-pigeon

R O B I N.

TUNE—*Dainty Davie*.

There was a lad was born in Kyle,
But whatna day o' whatna style,
I doubt it's hardly worth my while
To be sac nice wi' Robin.

Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin', rantin' rovin' ;
Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin' Robin !

Our monarch's hindmost year but aye
Was five-and-twenty days begun,
'Twas then a blast o' Janwar' win'
 Blew handsel¹ in on Robin.

The gossip keekit in his loof,
Quo' seho, wha lives will see the proof,
This waly boy will be nae coof;
 I think we'll ca' him Robin.

He'll ha'e misfortunes great and sma',
But aye a heart aboon them a';
He'll be a credit till us a'—
 We'll a' be proud o' Robin.

But sure as three times three mak nine,
I see by ilka score and line,
This chap will dearly like our kin',
 So iceze me on thee, Robin.²

peeped—palm

goodly—fool

blessings

ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF ROBERT RUISSAUX.³

Now Robin lies in his last lair,
He'll gabble rhyme nor sing nae mair,
Cauld poverty, wi' hungry stare,
 Nae mair shall fear him;
Nor anxious fear, nor cankert care,
 E'er mair come near him.

To tell the truth, they seldom fash't him,
Except the moment that they crush't him;
For sune as chance or fate had hush't 'em,
 Though e'er sae short,
Then wi' a rhyme or sang he lash't 'em,
 And thought it sport.

Though he was bred to kintra wark,
And counted was baith wight and stark,
Yet that was never Robin's mark
 To mak a man;
But tell him, he was learned and clark,
 Ye roosed him than!

troubled

praised

¹ A gift for a particular season, or the first money received on any particular occasion.

² It has been said, but upon no good authority that I am aware of, that there was some foundation in fact for this tale of a gossip—a wayfaring woman, who chanced to be present at the poet's birth, having actually announced some such prophecies respecting the infant placed in her arms. Some similar circumstances attended the birth of Mirabeau.

³ Ruisseaux, Fr. for rivulets, a translation of his own name.

In the first of these versicles, he alludes to the attachment which he had formed for the most celebrated of all his heroines, and his subsequent wife—JEAN. She was the daughter of a master-mason named Armour, residing in the village of Mauchline. Her husband has perfectly described her at this period of her life—

A dancin', sweet, young handsome quean,
Of guileless heart.

The acquaintance appears to have commenced not long after the poet took up his residence at Mossiel. There was a race at Mauchline in the end of April, and there it was customary for the young men, with little ceremony, to invite such girls as they liked off the street into a humble dancing-hall, where a fiddler had taken up his station to give them music. The payment of a penny for a dance was held by the minstrel as guerdon sufficient. Burns and Jean happened to be in the same dance, but not as partners, when some confusion and a little merriment was excited by his dog tracking his footsteps through the room. He playfully remarked to his partner, that ‘he wished he could get any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did.’ A short while after, he passed through the Mauchline washing-green, where Jean, who had overheard his remark, was bleaching clothes. His dog running over the clothes, the young maiden desired him to call it off, and this led them into conversation. Archly referring to what passed at the dance, she asked if ‘he had yet got any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog?’ From that time their intimacy commenced. The affections of Burns were quickly centered upon her. There were other maidens in Mauchline, some with weightier attractions, but no one could henceforth compete with Jean. So he himself tells us:—

THE BELLES OF MAUCHLINE.

In Mauchline there dwells six proper young belles,

The pride of the place and its neighbourhood a’,
Their carriage and dress, a stranger would guess,

In Lou’on or Paris, they’d gotten it a’.

Miss Miller is fine, Miss Markland’s divine,

Miss Smith she has wit, and Miss Betty is braw,
There’s beauty and fortune to get wi’ Miss Morton;

But Armour’s the jewel for me o’ them a’.¹

¹ It may be gratifying to curiosity to know the fates of the six belles of Mauchline. Miss Helen Miller, the first mentioned, married Burns’s friend, Dr Mackenzie. The ‘divine’ Miss Markland became through our poet acquainted with, and subsequently married to, Mr

Burns was now twenty-six years old, an age at or before which poetical talent has usually displayed itself in nearly its utmost perfection; yet he had then composed only a few songs upon the bonny lasses of his neighbourhood, and a small number of poems of a thoroughly minor description. He had hitherto, indeed, only expressed some of the predominant feelings of his own bosom, or commented on some of the more striking circumstances of his own condition. To practise poetry as an art, whether to attain perfection in it for its own sake, or as something that might help him forward in life, had never occurred to him. Unlike what would have happened with such a man in these days of universal reading, and nearly as universal writing; but in the time of Burns, rustic bards, when they arose, were little tempted to aspire to the honours of print, and scarcely a single volume by such a person had as yet seen the light in Scotland. Burns was still, therefore, without an aim—alternately groaning under the ill-requited labours of his farm, and the darkness of all his worldly prospects, and indulging in merry bouts at mason-lodges, where care was for the time cast aside, and his soul expanded under the glowing sun of ideal philanthropy. A minute chronology is here of more importance in illustrating the literary history of Burns than his biographers seem hitherto to have observed. It is a remarkable circumstance that the mass of the poetry which has given this extraordinary man his principal fame, burst from him in the course of a comparatively short space of time—certainly not exceeding fifteen months. It began to flow of a sudden, and it ran on in one impetuous, brilliant stream, till it seemed to have become, comparatively speaking, exhausted.

In the well-known letter of Gilbert Burns, it is affirmed that the Torbolton period was one marked by little improvement. This is in the main true. Burns had advanced in this period from his nineteenth to his twenty-sixth year; he had freely given way to his strong instinct for *reading*; he had used means to sharpen his intellect in the debating-club; he had written, as we have

Finlay, an officer of Excise, first at Torbolton, afterwards at Greenock. The witty Miss Jean Smith bestowed herself upon Mr Candlish, who also was a friend of Burns. The ‘braw’ Miss Betty (Miller), sister of the first of the series, became Mrs Templeton, and died early in life. Miss Morton gave her beauty and fortune to Mr Paterson, a ‘merchant’ in Mauchline. Of Armour’s history Immortality has taken charge. It is remarkable that, in 1851, when this work was going for the first time through the press, three of these ladies survived—namely, Mrs Finlay, Mrs Paterson, and Mrs Candlish. All have since (January 1854) parted from time. When Mrs Paterson, at eighty-seven, was within a few hours of breathing her last, a grandson asked if she remembered Burns. ‘Ay, brawly that!’ was her reply.

seen him write, excellent prose epistles to his father and cousin, besides some love-ditties, and a few small poems. Yet we may well believe that any progress he had made was of a rambling and desultory nature, very different from what might have been attained if he had all the time been steadily pursuing one intellectual object. Neither can we doubt that his vein of poetry would have been better worked during this period, if the poor poet had been allowed to indulge in the slightest hope of turning it to the same account as more substantial mines. But this is especially the period when he was ‘unfitted with an aim.’ He had nothing placed before him which he might hope to gain by any means within his power. Probably any song he wrote in those days, or any time he spent in reading, was looked upon as an indication of tendencies unfavourable to his worldly prospects, such as these were. Such things could not be very highly approved of in a family circle where hard work had come to be looked to as the only means, and, after all, a barely sufficient one, to keep sheer starvation at a distance. Perhaps, as the poet was not without a tolerable share of worldly sense, they were in his secret bosom no more highly approved of by himself.

The year 1784 had therefore arrived—Burns was passing through his twenty-sixth summer—and he had as yet written little, and that little, as we have seen, was not, generally speaking, of a nature to have much distinguished him. From this time, however, or a time not long subsequent, there is a great change in Burns.

The first true determination of his mind towards literary exertion, with a feeling as to its usual aims and results, appears in certain entries in his Commonplace-book, which are undated, so far as the year is concerned, but may, though not without some hesitation, be set down to 1784. Here we see him at length beginning to view his literary powers as giving him at least a chance of ranking with the unknown bards of the past, from whom Scotland mainly derives her national stock of songs and ballads:—

August.

However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more excellent Fergusson, yet I am hurt to see other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, &c., immortalised in such celebrated performances, while my dear native country—the ancient bailieries of Carrick, Kyle, and Cunningham, famous both in ancient and modern times for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants—a

country where civil, and particularly religious liberty, have ever found their first support, and their last asylum—a country, the birth-place of many famous philosophers, soldiers, and statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in Scottish history, particularly a great many of the actions of the glorious Wallace, the saviour of his country; yet we have never had one Scotch poet of any eminence to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Ayr, and the heathy mountainous source and winding sweep of Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, &c. This is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but, alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and education. Obscure I am, and obscure I must be, though no young poet, nor young soldier's heart, ever beat more fondly for fame than mine—

' And if there is no other scene of being
 Where my insatiate wish may have its fill—
 This something at my heart that heaves for room,
 My best, my dearest part, was made in vain.'

August.

A FRAGMENT.

TUNE—I had a Horse, I had nae mair.

When first I came to Stewart Kyle,
 My mind it was na steady,
 Where'er I gaed, where'er I rade,
 A mistress still I had aye.

But when I came roun' by Mauchline toun,
 Not dreadin' anybody,
 My heart was caught before I thought,
 And by a Mauchline lady.

September.

There is a great irregularity in the old Scotch songs, a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of accent and measure that the English poetry requires, but which glides in, most melodiously, with the respective tunes to which they are set. For instance, the fine old song of *The Mill, Mill, O*, to give it a plain, prosaic reading, it halts prodigiously out of measure: on the other hand, the song set to the same tune in Bremner's collection of Scotch songs, which begins: 'To Fanny fair could I impart,' &c., is in most exact measure, and yet, let them both be sung before a real critic, one above the biases of prejudice, but a thorough judge of nature, how flat and spiritless will the last appear, how trite, and tamely methodical, compared with the wild warbling cadence, the heart-moving melody of the first! This is particularly the case with all those airs which end with a hypermetrical

syllable. There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions and fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers, the common people—a certain happy arrangement of old Scotch syllables, and yet, very frequently, nothing, not even like rhyme, or sameness of jingle, at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine, that perhaps it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a nice judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favourite airs, particularly that class of them mentioned above, independent of rhyme altogether.

There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness, in some of our ancient ballads, which shew them to be the work of a masterly hand: and it has often given me many a heartache to reflect that such glorious old bards—bards who very probably owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love, with such fine strokes of nature—that their very names (oh how mortifying to a bard's vanity!) are now ‘buried among the wreck of things which were.’

Oh ye illustrious names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well: the last, the meanest of the Muse's train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you—a poor rustic bard unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory! Some of you tell us, with all the charms of verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world—unfortunate in love: he, too, has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and, worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored. Like you, all his consolation was his Muse: she taught him in rustic measures to complain. Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse! May the turf lie lightly on your bones!—and may you now enjoy that solace and rest which this world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesy and love!

September 8.

The following fragment is done something in imitation of the manner of a noble old Scottish piece called *M'Millan's Peggy*, and sings to the tune of ‘Gala Water.’ My Montgomery's Peggy was my deity for six or eight months. She had been bred (though, as the world says, without any just pretence for it) in a style of life rather elegant; but as Vanburgh says, in one of his comedies: ‘My — star found me out’ there too; for though I began the affair merely in a *gaieté de cœur*, or, to tell the truth, which will scarcely be believed, a vanity of shewing my parts in courtship, particularly my abilities at a *billet-doux*, which I always piqued myself upon, made me lay siege to her; and when, as I always do in my foolish

gallantries, I had battered myself into a very warm affection for her, she told me one day, in a flag of truce, that her fortress had been for some time before the rightful property of another; but, with the greatest friendship and politeness, she offered me every alliance except actual possession. I found out afterwards that what she told me of a pre-engagement was really true; but it cost me some heartaches to get rid of the affair.

I have even tried to imitate, in this extempore thing, that irregularity in the rhyme which, when judiciously done, has such a fine effect on the ear.

F R A G M E N T.

Although my bed were in yon muir, &c.¹

There is a fragment in imitation of an old Scotch song, well known among the country ingle-sides. I cannot tell the name either of the song or the tune, but they are in fine unison with one another. By the way, these old Scottish airs are so nobly sentimental, that when one would compose to them, to 'south the tune,' as our Scotch phrase is, over and over, is the readiest way to catch the inspiration, and raise the bard into that glorious enthusiasm so strongly characteristic of our old Scotch poetry. I shall here set down one verse of the piece mentioned above, both to mark the song and tune I mean, and likewise as a debt I owe to the author, as the repeating of that verse has lighted up my flame a thousand times:—

'When clouds in skies do come together
To hide the brightness of the weather,
There will surely be some pleasant weather
When a' their storms are past and gone.'²

'Though fickle fortune has deceived me,
She promised fair, and performed but ill;
Of mistress, friends, and wealth bereaved me,
Yet I bear a heart shall support me still.'

'I'll act with prudence as far's I'm able,
But if success I must never find,
Then come misfortune, I bid thee welcome,
I'll meet thee with an undaunted mind.'

The above was an extempore, under the pressure of a heavy train of misfortunes, which indeed threatened to undo me altogether. It was just at the close of that dreadful period mentioned, p. viii.;³ and though the weather has brightened up a little with me, yet there

¹ See *ante*, the song entitled *Montgomery's Peggy*.

² Alluding to the misfortunes he feelingly laments before this verse.—B.

³ Reference is here made to that part of the Commonplace-book bearing date March 1784.

has always been since a tempest brewing round me in the grim sky of futurity, which I pretty plainly see will some time or other, perhaps ere long, overwhelm me, and drive me into some doleful dell, to pine in solitary, squalid wretchedness. However, as I hope my poor country Muse, who, all rustic, awkward, and unpolished as she is, has more charms for me than any other of the pleasures of life beside—as I hope she will not then desert me, I may even then learn to be, if not happy, at least easy, and *sowth a sang* to soothe my misery.

'Twas at the same time I set about composing an air in the old Scotch style. I am not musical scholar enough to prick down my tune properly; so it can never see the light, and perhaps 'tis no great matter, but the following were the verses I composed to suit it:—

Oh raging fortune's withering blast
Has laid my leaf full low, O !
Oh raging fortune's withering blast
Has laid my leaf full low, O !

My stem was fair, my bud was green,
My blossom sweet did blow, O ;
The dew fell fresh, the sun rose mild,
And made my branches grow, O .

But luckless fortune's northern storms
Laid a' my blossoms low, O ,
But luckless fortune's northern storms
Laid a' my blossoms low, O .

The tune consisted of three parts, so that the above verses just went through the whole air.

To quote the valuable letter of his brother Gilbert: ‘ Among the earliest of his poems was the *Epistle to Davie*. Robert often composed without any regular plan. When anything made a strong impression on his mind, so as to rouse it to any poetic exertion, he would give way to the impulse, and embody the thought in rhyme. If he hit on two or three stanzas to please him, he would then think of proper introductory, connecting, and concluding stanzas; hence the middle of a poem was often first produced. It was, I think, in summer 1784, when in the interval of harder labour, he and I were weeding in the garden (kail-yard), that he repeated to me the principal part of this epistle. I believe the first idea of Robert’s becoming an author was started on this occasion. I was much pleased with the epistle, and said to him I was of opinion it would bear being printed.’

This poem appears to have been completed, as it now stands, in January 1785, for a copy in the poet's handwriting exists in possession of Miss Grace Aiken, Ayr, bearing that date, and with the following more ample title—*An Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet, Lover, Ploughman, and Fiddler.*

EPISTLE TO DAVIE,

A BROTHER POET.

January —

While winds frae aff Ben-Lomond blaw,
And bar the doors wi' driving snaw,

 And hing us owre the ingle,
I set me down to pass the time,
And spin a verse or two o' rhyme,

 In hamely westlin' jingle.
While frosty winds blaw in the drift,

 Ben to the chimla lug,
I grudge a wee the great folk's gift,
That live sae bien and snug :

 I tent less, and want less
 Their roomy fireside ;
 But hanker and canker
 To see their cursed pride.

in—ear
little
comfortably

It's hardly in a body's power
To keep, at times, frae being sour,
 To see how things are shared ;
How best o' chiels are whiles in want,
While coofs on countless thousands rant,
 And ken na how to wair't ;
But, Davie, lad, ne'er fash your head,
 Though we hae little gear

We're fit to win our daily bread,
 As lang's we're hale and fier :
 ‘ Mair spier na, nor fear na,’¹
 Auld age ne'er mind a feg,
The last o't, the warst o't,
 Is only but to beg.²

fools
know—spend
trouble
wealth

sound
ask
fig

¹ Ramsay.

² ‘ The old-remembered beggar, even in my own time, like the baccoch, or travelling cripple of Ireland, was expected to merit his quarters by something beyond an exposition of his distresses. He was often a talkative, facetious fellow, prompt at repartee, and not withheld from exercising his power that way by any respect of persons, his patched cloak giving him the privilege of the ancient jester. To be a *guid crack*—that is, to possess talents for conversation—was essential to the trade of a “ *puir body* ” of the more esteemed class; and Burns, who delighted in the amusement their discourses afforded, seems to have looked forward

To lie in kilns and barns at e'en,
 When banes are crazed, and bluid is thin,
 Is doubtless great distress!
 Yet then content could make us blest;
 Even then, sometimes we'd snatch a taste
 Of truest happiness.
 The honest heart that's free frae a'
 Intended fraud or guile,
 However fortune kick the ba',
 Has aye some cause to smile:
 And mind still, you'll find still,
 A comfort this nae sma';
 Nae mair then, we'll care then,
 Nae farther we ean fa'.

What though, like commoners of air,
 We wander out we know not where,
 But either house or hal'?
 Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,
 The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,
 Are free alike to all.

hold

with gloomy firmness to the possibility of himself becoming, one day or other, a member of their itinerant society. In his poetical works, it is alluded to so often as perhaps to indicate that he considered the consummation as not utterly impossible. Thus, in the fine dedication of his works to Gavin Hamilton, he says:

"And when I downa yoke a naig,
 Then, Lord be thankit, I can beg."

Again, in his *Epistle to Davie*, a brother poet, he states that, in their closing career,

"The last o't, the warst o't,
 Is only but to beg."

And after having remarked, that

"To lie in kilns and barns at e'en,
 When banes are crazed, and bluid is thin,
 Is doubtless great distress,"

the bard reckons up, with true poetical spirit, that free enjoyment of the beauties of nature which might counterbalance the hardship and uncertainty of the life even of a mendicant. In one of his prose letters, to which I have lost the reference, he details this idea yet more seriously, and dwells upon it, as not ill adapted to his habits and powers. As the life of a Scottish mendicant of the eighteenth century seems to have been contemplated without much horror by Robert Burns, the author can hardly have erred in giving to Edie Ochiltree something of poetical character and personal dignity above the more abject of his miserable calling. The class had, in fact, some privileges. A lodging, such as it was, was readily granted to them in some of the outhouses; and the awmous (alms) of a handful of meal (called a gowpen) was scarce denied by the poorest cottager. The mendicant disposed these, according to their different quality, in various bags around his person, and thus carried about with him the principal part of his sustenance, which he literally received for the asking. At the houses of the gentry, his cheer was mended by scraps of broken meat, and perhaps a Scottish "twal-penny," or English penny, which was expended in snuff or whisky. In fact, these indolent peripatetics suffered much less real hardship and want of food than the poor peasants from whom they received alms.'—SIR WALTER SCOTT—*Notes to Antiquary*.

In days when daisies deck the ground,
 And blackbirds whistle clear,
 With honest joy our hearts will bound
 To see the coming year :
 On braes when we please, then,
 We'll sit and sowth a tune ;
 Syne rhyme till 't, we'll time till 't,
 And sing 't when we hae dune.

con

It's no in titles nor in rank ;
 It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
 To purchase peace and rest ;
 It's no in making muckle *mair* ;
 It's no in books ; it's no in lear,
 To mak us truly blest ;
 If happiness hae not her seat
 And centre in the breast,
 We may be wisc, or rich, or great,
 But never can be blest :
 Nae treasures nor pleasures
 Could make us happy lang ;
 The heart aye's the part aye
 That makes us right or wrang.

learning

Think ye, that sic as you and I,
 Wha drudge and drive through wet and dry,
 Wi' never-ceasing toil ;
 Think ye, we are less blest than they,
 Wha scarcely tent us in their way,
 As hardly worth their while ?
 Alas ! how aft, in haughty mood,
 God's creatures they oppress !
 Or else, neglecting a' that's guid,
 They riot in excess !
 Baith careless and fearless
 Of either heaven or hell !
 Estceming and deeming
 It's a' an idle tale !

observe

Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce ;
 Nor make our scanty pleasures less,
 By pining at our state ;
 And even should misfortunes come,
 I, here wha sit, hae met wi' some,
 An's thankfu' for them yet.
 They gie the wit of age to youth ;
 They let us ken oursel' ;
 They make us see the naked truth,
 The real guid and ill.

Though losses and crosses
Be lessons right severe,
There's wit there, ye'll get there,
Ye'll find nae other where.

But tent me, Davie, ace o' hearts !
(To say aught less wad wrang the cartes,
And flatt'ry I detest)
This life has joys for you and I ;
And joys that riches ne'er could buy ;
And joys the very best.
There's a' the pleasures o' the heart,
The lover and the frien' ;
Ye hae your Meg,¹ your dearest part,
And I my darling Jean !
It warms me, it charms me,
To mention but her name :
It heats me, it beats me,
And sets me a' on flame !

Oh all ye powers who rule above !
Oh Thou whose very self art love !
Thou know'st my words sincere !
The life-blood streaming through my heart,
Or my more dear immortal part,
Is not more fondly dear !
When heart-corroding care and grief
Deprive my soul of rest,
Her dear idea brings relief
And solace to my breast.
Thou Being, all-seeing,
Oh hear my fervent prayer !
Still take her, and make her
Thy most peculiar care !
All hail, ye tender feelings dear !
The smile of love, the friendly tear,
The sympathetic glow !
Long since, this world's thorny ways
Had numbered out my weary days,
Had it not been for you !

¹ Sillar's flame was a lass named Margaret Orr, who had the charge of the children of Mrs Stewart of Stair. Burns, accompanying his friend on a visit to Stair, found some other lasses there who were good singers, and communicated to them some of his songs in manuscript. Chanee threw one of these in the way of Mrs Stewart, who, being struck by its elegance and tenderness, resolved to become acquainted with the author. Accordingly, on his next visit to the house, he was asked to go into the drawing-room to see Mrs Stewart, who thus became the first friend he had above his own rank in life. It was not the fortune of 'Meg' to become Mrs Sillar.

Fate still has blest me with a friend,
 In every care and ill ;
 And oft a more endearing band,
 A tie more tender still.
 It lightens, it brightens
 The tenebris scene,
 To meet with, and greet with
 My Davie or my Jean !

Oh how that name inspires my style !
 The words come skelpin', rank and file,
 Amaist before I ken !

The ready measure rins as fine
 As Phœbus and the famous Nine
 Were glowrin' owre my pen.
 My spaviet Pegasus will limp, staring
 Till ance he's fairly het ;
 And then he'll hilch, and stilt, and jimp, hobble
 And rin an uneo fit : at a good pace
 But lest then, the beast then
 Should rue this hasty ride,
 I'll light now, and dight now,
 His sweaty, wizened hide.

Gilbert says in addition, and the addition is most interesting : 'I thought it [the epistle] at least equal, if not superior, to many of Allan Ramsay's epistles, and that the merit of these, and much other Scottish poetry, seemed to consist principally in the knack of the expression ; but here there was a strain of interesting sentiment, and the Scotticism of the language scarcely seemed affected, but appeared to be the natural language of the poet ; that, besides, there was certainly some novelty in a poet pointing out the consolations that were in store for him when he should go a-begging. Robert seemed very well pleased with my criticism, and we talked of sending it to some magazine ; but as this plan afforded no opportunity of learning how it would take, the idea was dropped.'

In the *seed-time* of 1785—the date is from the poet's own authority—he attended a masonic meeting at Torbolton, when there chanced to be also present the schoolmaster of the parish, a man with as powerful a self-esteem as the poet himself, though of a different kind, or manifested differently. This personage, John Wilson by name, to eke out a scanty subsistence, as Gilbert tells us, 'had set up a shop of grocery goods. Having accidentally fallen in with some medical books, and become most hobby-

horsically attached to the study of medicinc, he had added the sale of a few medicines to his little trade. He had got a shop-bill printed, at the bottom of which, overlooking his own incapacity, he had advertised that "Advice would be given in common disorders at the shop gratis." On this occasion he made a somewhat too ostentatious display of his medical attainments. It is said that Burns and he had a dispute, in which the poor dominic brought forward his therapeutics somewhat offensively. Be this as it may, in going home that night, Burns conceived, and partly composed, his poem of *Death and Dr Hornbook*. 'These circumstances,' adds Gilbert, 'he related when he repeated the verses to me next afternoon, as I was holding the plough, and he was letting the water off the field beside me.'

This, then, as far as we can see, is, next to the *Epistle to Davie*, the first considerable poem by Burns manifesting anything like the vigour which is characteristic of his principal pieces:—

DEATH AND DR HORNBOOK:

A TRUE STORY.

Some books are lies frae end to end,
And some great lies were never penned :
Ev'n ministers they hae been kenned,

In holy rapture,
A rousing whid at times to vend,
And nail't wi' Scripture.

ffb

But this that I am gaun to tell,
Which lately on a night befell,
Is just as true's the deil's in hell,
Or Dublin city :
That e'er he nearer comes oursel'
'S a muckle pity.

going

The clachan yill had made me canty—
I was na fou, but just had plenty ;
I stachered whyles, but yet took tent aye
To free the ditches ;
And hillocks, stanes, and bushes kenn'd aye
Frac ghaists and witches.

village ale

staggered

The rising moon began to glow'r
The distant Cumnock hills out-owre :
To count her horns, wi' a' my power,
I set mysel' ;
But whether she had three or four,
I could na tell.

stare

I was come round about the hill,
And toddlin' down on Willie's mill,¹
Setting my staff wi' a' my skill,
 To keep me sicker;
Though leeward whyles, against my will,
 I took a bicker.

sure
sometimes
short race

I there wi' Something did forgather,
That put me in an eerie swither;
An awfu' scythe, out-owre ac shouther,
 Clear-dangling, hang;
A three-taed leister on the ither
 Lay, large and lang.

dismal hesitation

Its stature seemed lang Scotch ells twa,
The queerest shape that e'er I saw,
For fient a wame it had ava;
 And then, its shanks,
They were as thin, as sharp and sma',
 As checks o' branks.²

belly

'Guid c'en,' quo' I; 'friend, hae ye been mawin',
When ither folk are busy sawin'?'
It seemed to mak a kind o' stan',
 But naething spak;
At length says I: 'Friend, whare ye gaun—
 Will ye go back?'

It spake right howe: 'My name is Death, hollow
But be na fley'd.' Quoth I: 'Guid faith, frightened
Ye're maybe come to stап my breath;
 But tent me, billie—

I red ye weel, tak care o' seath,
 Sec, there's a gully!'

advise—harm
clasp-knife

'Guidman,' quo' he, 'put up your whittle,
I'm no designed to try its mettle;
But if I did, I wad be kittle
 To be mislear'd;³
I wadna mind it, no that spittle
 Out-owre my beard.'

difficult

¹ Torbolton Mill, situated on the rivulet Faile, about two hundred yards to the east of the village, on the road to Mossgiel; then occupied by William Muir, an intimate friend of the Burns family—from him it was called *Willie's Mill*. 'Mr William Muir, Torbolton Mill,' appears amongst the subscribers to the Edinburgh edition of the poems, in which the above piece first appeared.

² Branks—a kind of wooden frame, forming, with a rope, a bridle for cows.

³ To be put out of my art. This is not the usual sense of the word, which Burns himself interprets in his glossary into mischievous, unmannerly; but the sense of the passage can only be so understood.

⁴ Both in the scythe and in this feature of the beard, which, as connected with a skeleton, is

'Weel, weel!' says I, 'a bargain be't;
 Come, gie's your hand, and sae we're gree't;
 We'll ease our shanks and tak a seat—limbs
 Come, gie's your news;
 This while ye hae been mony a gaet,road
 At mony a house.¹

'Ay, ay!' quo' he, and shook his head,
 'It's e'en a lang lang time indeed
 Sin' I began to nick the thread,
 And choke the breath:
 Folk maun do something for their bread,
 And sae maun Death.

'Sax thousand years are near hand fled
 Sin' I was to the butching bred,
 And mony a scheme in vain's been laid,
 To stab or seaur me;
 Till anc Hornbook's taen up the trade,
 And faith he'll waur me.

'Ye ken Jock Hornbook i' the clachan,village
 Deil mak his king's-hood in a spleuchan!
 He's grown sae weel acquaint wi' Buchan²tobacco-pouch
 And ither chaps,
 The weans haud out their fingers laughin',
 And pouk my hips.

'See, here's a scythe, and there's a dart,
 They hae pierced mony a gallant heart;
 But Doctor Hornbook wi' his art
 And cursèd skill,
 Has made them baith no worth a —;
 D—d haet they'll kill.

'Twas but yestreen, nae further gaen,
 I threw a noble throw at ane;
 Wi' less, I'm sure, I've hundreds slain;
 But deil-ma-care,
 It just played dirl³ on the bane,
 But did nae mair.

in plain prose a solecism, the poet appears to have had the ordinary figure of Time in view, rather than that of Death.

¹ Alluding to a recent epidemical fever.

² Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, then a popular book, and of course a readily available manual for a village Galen.

³ A short tremulous stroke.

‘ Hornbook was by wi’ ready art,
 And had sae fortified the part,
 That when I looked to my dart,
 It was sae blunt,
 Fient haet o’t wad hae pierc’d the heart
 O’ a kail-runt.

cabbage-root

‘ I drew my scythe in sic a fury,
 I near hand cowpit wi’ my hurry,
 But yet the bauld apothecary
 Withstood the shock ;
 I might as weel hae tried a quarry
 O’ hard whin rock.

tumbled over

‘ Even them he eanna get attended,
 Although their face he ne’er had kenned it,
 Just — in a kail-blade and send it,
 As soon’s he smells ’t,
 Baith their disease and what will mend it
 At once he tells ’t.

‘ And then a’ doctor’s saws and whittles,
 Of a’ dimensions, shapes, and metals,
 A’ kinds o’ boxes, mugs, and bottles,
 He’s sure to hae ;
 Their Latin names as fast he rattles
 As A B C.

‘ Calees o’ fossils, earths, and trees ;
 True sal-marimum o’ the seas ;
 The farina of beans and peas,
 He has ’t in plenty ;
 Aqua-fontis, what you please,
 He can content ye.

‘ Forbye some new, uncommon weapons,
 Urinus spiritus of capons ;
 Or mite-horn shavings, filings, scrapings,
 Distilled *per se* ;
 Sal-alkali o’ midge-tail clippings,
 And mony mac.’

‘ Wae’s me for Johnny Ged’s Hole¹ now,
 Quo’ I ; ‘ if that thae news be true,
 His braw calf-ward² where gowans grew,
 Sae white and bonny,
 Nae doubt they’ll rive it wi’ the plough ;
 They’ll ruin Johnny ! ’

daisies

¹ The parish gravedigger.² The church-yard, which had occasionally been used as an enclosure for calves.

The creature grained an cldritch laugh,
And says : ' Ye need na yoke the pleugh,
Kirkyards will soon be tilled eneugh,
Tak ye nae fear :
They 'll a' be trenched wi' mony a sheugh,
In twa-three year.

unearthly

furrow

' Whare I killed ane a fair strae death,
By loss o' blood or want o' breath,
This night, I 'm free to tak my aith,
That Hornbook's skill
Has clad a score i' their last elraith,
By drap and pill.

' An honest wabster to his trade,
Whase wife's twa nieves were scaree weel-bred,
Gat tippencce-worth to mend her head,
When it was sair ;
The wife slade cannie to her bed,
But ne'er spak mair.

' A bonny lass, ye ken her name,
Some ill-brewn drink had hoved her wame ;
She trusts hersel', to hide the shame,
To Hornbook's care ;
Horn sent her aff to her lang hame,
To hide it there.

' A country laird had taen the batts,
Or some curmurring in his guts ;
His only son for Hornbook sets,
And pays him well—
The lad, for twa guid gimmer-pets,
Was laird himsel'. young ewes

' That 's just a swatch o' Hornbook's way ;
Thus goes he on from day to day,
Thus does he poison, kill, and slay,
An 's weel paid for 't ;
Yet stops me o' my lawfu' prey
Wi' his d—d dirt :

' But hark ! I 'll tell you of a plot,
Though dinna ye be speaking o 't ;
I 'll nail the self-conceited sot
As dead 's a herrin' :
Niest time we meet, I 'll wad a groat,
He gets his fairin' ! '

But just as he began to tell,
 The auld kirk-hammer strak the bell,
 Some wee short hour ayont the twal,
 Which raised us baith :
 I took the way that pleased mysel',
 And sae did Death.¹

Now commences that burst of poesy which we have spoken of as so remarkable in Burns's history. Early in this year, on Fasten's e'en (*Anglice*, Shrovetide), there was a *rocking* at Mossgiel. Gilbert explains this term:—‘It is derived from those primitive times when the country-women employed their spare hours in spinning on a rock or distaff. This simple instrument is a very portable one, and well fitted to the social inclination of meeting in a neighbour's house; hence the phrase of *going a-rocking*, or *with the rock*. As the connection the phrase had with the implement was forgotten when the rock gave place to the spinning-wheel, the phrase came to be used by both sexes on social occasions, and men talk of going with their rocks as well as women.’ There was then a simple frugal social meeting at Mossgiel, when, among other entertainments, each did his or her best at singing. One sang a pleasing specimen of the rustic lore of Ayrshire, understood to be the composition of a person now in advanced years, named Lapraik, residing at Muirkirk. It was expressive of the happy affection of a husband for his wife during a period of misfortunes, and was as follows:—

‘When I upon thy bosom lean,
 Enraptured I do call thee mine,
 I glory in those sacred ties,
 That made us ane wha ance were twain.

¹ The publication of this poem was of course discomfiting to the poor schoolmaster, though he is said to have been in reality a respectable man in his legitimate capacity, and even useful as a dispenser of medicines in a village which had then no medical practitioner within four miles. He afterwards left the place, in consequence of a dispute about salary with the heritors, and settled in Glasgow, where he long kept a respectable seminary for youth of both sexes. One who studied under him there, describes him as in general of easy temper, but remarkable for self-complacency. He ultimately rose to be session-clerk of the Gorbals, a comparatively lucrative situation.

Gilbert Burns used to relate that Wilson once spoke to him of the poem. He said it was pretty severe in some things; but, on the whole, it was rather a compliment. This qualifying ‘rather’ amused Gilbert very much.—*Letter of Miss Isabella Begg.*

Dr Hornbook died at an advanced age in 1839. Though Torbolton has not been much enlarged since his time, it has now three regular practitioners of medicine.

A mutual flame inspires us baith,
The tender look, the melting kiss ;
Even years shall ne'er destroy our love,
Some sweet sensation new will rise.

Have I a wish, 'tis all for thee,
I know thy wish is me to please ;
Our moments pass so sweet away,
That numbers on us look and gaze.
Well pleased to see our happy days,
They bid us live and still love on ;
And if some cares shall chance to rise,
Thy bosom still shall be my home.

I'll lull me there, and take my rest,
And if that aught disturb my fair,
I'll bid her laugh her cares all out,
And beg her not to drop a tear.
Have I a joy, 'tis all her own,
Her heart and mine are all the same ;
They're like the woodbine round the tree,
That's twined till death shall us disjoin.'

Burns was so much pleased with the ditty, that he soon after sent a versified epistle to the supposed author :—

EPISTLE TO J. LAPRAIK,¹

AN OLD SCOTTISH BARD.

April 1, 1785.

While briers and woodbines budding green,
And patridges scraichin' loud at e'en,
And morning poussie whiddin seen,
Inspire my Musc,
This freedom in an unknown frien'
I pray excuse.

hare

On Fasten-e'en we had a rockin',
To ca' the crack and weave our stockin';
And there was muckle fun and jokin',
Ye need na doubt;
At length we had a hearty yokin'
At sang about.

chat

¹ Lapraik is apparently the same name with Leprevick, honourable in the history of Scottish literature, as having been borne by one of the most distinguished of our early printers. In 1364, David II. confirmed a charter of William de Cunningham, Lord of Carrick, to James de Leprewick, of half the lands of Polkairne, in King's Kyle (*Wood's Peerage*, i. 321), which shews that there were persons of that name at an early period connected with the district.

There was ae sang, amang the rest,
 Aboon them a' it pleased me best,
 That some kind husband had address
 To some sweet wife :
 It thirled the heart-strings through the breast,
 A' to the life.

I've scarce heard ought described sae weel,
 What generous manly bosoms feel ;
 Thought I, 'Can this be Pope, or Steele,
 Or Beattie's wark ?'
 They tauld me 'twas an odd kind chiel
 About Muirkirk.

It pat me fidgin-fain to hear 't,
 And sae about him there I spier't,
 Then a' that kent him round declar'd
 He had ingine,
 That name excelled it, few cam near 't,
 It was sae fine.

excitedly eager
inquired

genius

That, set him to a pint of ale,
 And either douce or merry tale,
 Or rhymes and sangs he'd made himsel',
 Or witty catches,
 'Tween Inverness and Teviotdale,
 He had few matches.

grave

Then up I gat, and swore an aith,
 Though I should pawn my pleugh and graith,
 Or die a cadger pownic's death
 At some dike back,
 A pint and gill I'd gie them baith
 To hear your crack.

harness
pedler

ehat

But, first and foremost, I should tell,
 Amaist as soon as I could spell,
 I to the crambo-jingle fell,
 Though rude and rough,
 Yet crooning to a body's sell,
 Does weel encugh.

humming

I am nae poet, in a sense,
 But just a rhymer, like, by chance,
 And hae to learning nae pretence,
 Yet, what the matter !
 Whene'er my Muse does on me glance,
 I jingle at her.

Your critic folk may cock their nose,
 And say: ' How can you e'er propose,
 You, wha ken hardly verse frae prose,
 To mak a sang ?'
 But, by your leaves, my learned foes,
 Ye're maybe wrang.

What's a' your jargon o' your schools,
 Your Latin names for horns and stools ;
 If honest Nature made you fools,
 What sairs your grammars ?
 Ye'd better taen up spades and shools,
 Or knappin-hammers.

A set o' dull conceited hashes,
 Confuse their brains in college-classes !
 They gang in stirks, and come out asses,
 Plain truth to speak ;
 And syne they think to climb Parnassus
 By dint o' Greek !

Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire !
 That's a' the learning I desire ;
 Then though I drudge through dub and mire
 At pleugh or cart,
 My Muse, though hamely in attire,
 May touch the heart.¹

Oh for a spunk o' Allan's glee,
 Or Fergusson's, the bauld and slce,
 Or bright Lapraik's, my friend to be,
 If I can hit it !
 That would be lear enough for me,
 If I could get it !

Now, sir, if ye hae friends enow,
 Though real friends I b'lieve are few,
 Yet, if your catalogue be fou,
 I 'se no insist,
 But gif ye want ae friend that's true,
 I'm on your list.

¹ 'Great Apollo! if thou art in a giving humour, give me—I ask no more—but one stroke of native humour, with a single spark of thy own fire along with it; and send Mercury, with the *rules and compasses*, if he can be spared, with my compliments to—no matter.'—*Tristram Shandy*.

I winna blaw about mysel'; boast
As ill I like my fauts to tell;
But friends and folk that wish me well,
They sometimes roose me; praise
Though I maun own, as monie still
As far abuse me.

But Mauchline race,¹ or Mauchline fair,
I should be proud to meet you there;
We'se gie ae night's discharge to Care,
If we forgather,
And hae a swap o' rhymin'-ware
Wi' anither.

The four-gill chap, we 'se gar him clatter,
And kirsen him wi' reekin' water;
Syne we 'll sit down and tak our whitter,²
To cheer our heart;
And, faith, we 'se be acquainted better
Before we part.

But ye whom social pleasure charms,
Whose hearts the tide of kindness warms,
Who hold your being on the terms,
 ' Each aid the others,'
Come to my bowl, come to my arms,
 My friends, my brothers !

But, to conelude my lang epistle,
As my auld pen's worn to the grissle;
Twa lines frae you wad gar me fисse,
 Who am, most fervent,
While I can either sing or whissle,
 Your friend and servant.³

Lapraik was not slow to apprehend the value of the offered correspondence. He sent an answer by the hands of his son,

¹ This was celebrated on the road adjoining to Burns's farm of Mossgiel.

² A hearty draught of liquor.

² See Appendix, No. 6.

who lately lived to relate the circumstances attending its delivery. He found the goodman of Mossiel in a field engaged in sowing. ‘‘I’m no sure if I ken the hand,’’ said Burns as he took the letter; but no sooner had he glanced at its contents, than, unconsciously letting go the sheet containing the grain, it was not till he had finished reading that he discovered the loss he had sustained.¹ Does not the reader delight in this anecdote, so significant of the character of Burns, ever ready and apt to sacrifice the worldly and the professional to the spirits of poetry and of friendship!

Without long delay, the poet replied:

SECOND EPISTLE TO J. LAPRAIK.

April 21, 1785.

While new-ca’d kye rowte at the stake,
And pownies reek in pleugh or braik,²
This hour on e’enin’s edge I take,
 To own I’m debtor,
To honest-hearted auld Lapraik,
 For his kind letter.

Forjeskit sair, wi’ weary legs,
Rattlin’ the corn out-owre the rigs,
Or dealing through amang the naigs
 Their ten-hours’ bite,
My awkwart Muse sair pleads and begs
 I would na write.

The tapetless ramfeezl’d hizzic,
She’s saft at best, and something lazy,
Quo’ she: ‘Ye ken, we’ve been sae busy
 This month and mair,
That trouth, my head is grown right dizzie,
 And something sair.’

Her dowff excuses pat me mad:
‘Conscience,’ says I, ‘ye thowless jad! ’
I’ll write, and that a hearty blaud,
 stupid
 feeble
 effusion
 This very night;
Sae dinna ye affront your trade,
 But rhyme it right.

¹ *Contemporaries of Burns*, p. 26.

² Braik, a kind of harrow.—*Burns’s Glossary*. More precisely, a heavy harrow; a harrow loaded with a log. It is an implement much used in Ayr and Renfrew shires.

Shall bauld Lapraik, the king o' hearts,
 Though mankind were a pack o' cartes,
 Roose you sae weel for your deserts, praise
 In terms sae friendly,
 Yct ye 'll neglect to shaw your parts,
 And thank him kindly ?'

Sae I gat paper in a blink,
 And down gaed stumpie in the ink :
 Quoth I : ' Before I sleep a wink,
 I vow I 'll close it ;
 And if ye winna mak it clink,
 By Jove I 'll prose it ! '

Sae I 've begun to scrawl, but whether
 In rhyme, or prose, or baith thegither,
 Or some hotch-potch that 's rightly neither,
 Let time mak proof ;
 But I shall scribble down some blether, nonsense
 Just clean aff-loof. off-hand

My worthy friend, ne'er grudge and carp,
 Though fortune use you hard and sharp ;
 Come, kittle up your moorland-harp tickle
 Wi' gleesome touch ;
 Ne'er mind how Fortune waft and warp—
 She's but a b—h !

She's gien me monie a jirt and fleg, jerk—kick
 Sin' I could striddle owre a rig ;
 But, by the L—, though I should beg
 Wi' lyart pow, gray
 I'll laugh, and sing, and shake my leg,
 As lang 's I dow ! can

Now comes the sax-and-twentieth simmer,
 I've seen the bud upo' the timmer,
 Still persecuted by the limmer,
 Frae year to year ;
 But yet, despite the kittle kimmer, skittish
 I, Rob, am here.

Do ye envy the city gent,
 Behint a kist to lie and sklent,
 Or purse-proud, big wi' cent. per cent.
 And muckle wame,
 In some bit brugh to represent
 A bailie's name ?

Or is't the paughty, feudal Thane,
Wi' ruffled sark and glancing cane,
Wha thinks himsel' nae sheep-shank bane,
But lordly stalks,
While caps and bonnets aff are taen,
As by he walks?

haughty
shirt

Oh Thou wha gies us each guid gift !
Gie me o' wit and sense a lift,
Then turn me, if Thou please, adrift,
Through Scotland wide ;
Wi' cits nor lairds I wadna shift,
In a' their pride !

Were this the charter of our state,
'On pain o' hell be rich and great,'
Damnation then would be our fate,
Beyond remead ;
But, thanks to Heaven, that's no the gaet
We learn our creed.

For thus the royal mandate ran,
When first the human race began—
'The social, friendly, honest man,
Whate'er he be,
'Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan,
And none but he !'

Oh mandate glorious and divine !
The followers o' the ragged Nine,
Poor thoughtless devils ! yet may shine
In glorious light,
While sordid sons o' Mammon's line
Are dark as night.

Though here they serape, and squeeze, and growl,
Their worthless nievefu' of a soul
May in some future carcass howl,
The forest's fright ;
Or in some day-detestin' owl
May shun the light.

handful

Then may Lapraik and Burns arise,
To reach their native kindred skies,
And sing their pleasures, hopes, and joys,
In some mild sphere,
Still closer knit in friendship's ties,
Each passing year !

The west of Scotland was at this time, theologically, in a very different state from what it was a century before, when it gave so many martyrs to the sternest principles of Presbyterianism. There was, indeed, all over Scotland a reaction in the eighteenth century from the fervour of the seventeenth. The most moderate principles ruled in the church-courts. Many individual clergymen exercised their functions in a style for which lukewarm would be too complaisant a word. In Ayrshire, where Calvinism had formerly been in the highest vogue, there was a more than usual declension from its standard of orthodoxy. It was generally believed, and there now can be little doubt of the fact, that an Arminianism, verging towards the dogmas of Socinus, had taken possession of many pulpits. The work of John Taylor of Norwich, entitled the *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, had been extensively read in Ayrshire among the clergy as well as laity, and given rise to a pretty definite form of rationalism, which was recognised by the cant term of the *New Light*.¹ As usual, minds of an active and restless character, especially when accompanied by philanthropic dispositions, had embraced this New Light, while the mass of the vulgar, and a section of the clergy, remained steadfast under the faith as it had been among their fathers. These were called ‘the Whigs,’ as representing the ancient religious party of that name, or were spoken of as adherents of the *Auld Light*. It affords a striking idea of the length which the new doctrines had gone, that a busy-brained old tradesman in Kilmarnock, by name John Goldie, or Goudie, published a book freely discussing the authority of the Scriptures, first in 1780, and in a new edition in 1785, without incurring an inconvenient degree of public odium.

We have seen it stated by Dr Currie that William Burness had composed a little manual of religious belief for the use of his children, ‘in which the benevolence of his heart seems to have led him to soften the rigid Calvinism of the Scottish Church into something approaching to Arminianism.’ He was, in short, tinctured with the New Light, though modesty and prudence induced him to say very little on the subject. The poet, besides deriving a tendency that way from his father, had conversed with men of still more decided views at Irvine. While probably retaining, or thinking he retained, a hold of the main doctrines of Christianity, his vigorous and benevolent mind, and, as he has

¹ See Appendix, No. 7.

himself confessed, ‘a desire of shining in conversation-parties’—possibly, besides all this, an enjoyment in saying things calculated to startle common minds—led him into a by no means subdued demonstration of New-Light principles. In the rustic groups which gather at church-doors before the commencement of service, or in the interval between forenoon and afternoon services, he would argue pertinaciously and loudly on such points, sometimes to the admiration, but as often to the distress or horror, of his hearers. It would be difficult to say how much of his heterodoxy was unreal, how much only temporary—a passing gust of opinion—but certainly he appeared to some at this time as entirely Socinian.¹ He seems to have believed that the religious mind of the country was undergoing a revolution which must result in the abandonment of Calvinism. Such is the spirit of a short epistle in rhyme to Goudie on the publication of the second edition of his Essays:—

EPISTLE TO JOHN GOUDIE OF KILMARNOCK,

ON THE PUBLICATION OF HIS ESSAYS.

Poor gapin', glowrin' Superstition,
Wae's me! she's in a sad condition;
Fie! bring Black Jock, her state-physician,
To see her water.
Alas! there's ground o' great suspicion
She'll ne'er get better.

Auld Orthodoxy lang did grapple,
But now she's got an unco ripple ;
Haste, gie her name up i' the chapel,
 Nigh unto death ;
See, how she fetches at the thrapple,
 And gasps for breath.

¹ He himself, in a letter to Mr Candlish, March 1787, speaks of his having, ‘in the pride of despising old women’s stories, ventured in “the daring path Spinoza trod;” but, he adds, ‘experience of the weakness, not the strength, of human powers, made me glad to grasp at revealed religion.’

² That is, give in her name at church, to be prayed for.

Enthusiasm's past redemption,
 Gane in a galloping consumption,
 Not a' the quacks, wi' a' their gumption,
 Will ever mend her.

cleverness

Her feeble pulse gics strong presumption
 Death soon will end her.

'Tis you and Taylor are the chief
 Wha are to blame for this mischief,
 But gin the L—'s ain fous gat leave,

A toom tar-barrel

And twa red peats wad send relief,
 And end the quarrel.

empty

The person here called *Black Jock* was the Rev. John Russell, one of the ministers of the town where Goudie resided. He was a huge, dark-complexioned, stern-looking man, of tremendous energy in the pulpit, of harsh and unloving nature, and a powerful defender of the strongholds of Calvinism. There was much room for his zeal in Kilmarnock, for so long ago as 1764, a New-Light clergyman named Lindsay had been introduced there, and had of course given a certain amount of currency to what Burns called common-sense (that is, rationalistic) views. There was another zealous partisan of the Auld Light—a Mr Alexander Moodie—in the adjacent parish of Riccarton, and it was of course most desirable for two such champions in such circumstances to remain united. It so happened, however, that a dryness arose between them. The country story is, that as they were riding home one evening from Ayr, Moodie, in a sportive frame of mind, amused himself by tickling the rear of his neighbour's horse. The animal performed certain antics along the road, much to the amusement of the passing wayfarers, but greatly to the discomfiture of its rider, who, afterwards learning the trick, could not forgive Moodie for it. Afterwards, a question of parochial boundaries arose between them—it came before the presbytery for determination. 'There, in the open court,' says Mr Lockhart, 'to which the announcement of the discussion had drawn a multitude of the country-people, and Burns among the rest, the reverend divines, hitherto sworn friends and associates, lost all command of temper, and abused each other *coram populo*, with a fiery virulence of personal invective such as has long been banished from all popular assemblies, whcrein the laws of courtesy are enforced by those of a certain unwritten code.' This

was too much temptation for the profane wit of Burns. He lost no time in putting the affair into the following allcgorical shape:—

THE TWA HERDS; OR, THE HOLY TULZIE.¹

Oh a' ye pious godly flocks,
Weel fed on pastures orthodox,
Wha now will keep ye frae the fox,
 Or worrying tykes,
Or wha will tent the waifs and crooks,
 About the dikes ?

dogs
stragglers—old ewes

The twa best herds in a' the wast,
That e'er gae Gospel-horn a blast,
These five-and-twenty simmers past,
 Oh dool to tell,
Hae had a bitter black outcast
 quarrel
Atween themsel'.

Oh, Moodie, man, and wordy Russell,
How could you raise so vile a bustle,
Ye'll see how New-Light herds will whistle,
 And think it fine:
The L—'s cause ne'er got sic a twistle
 Sin' I hae min'.

Oh, sirs ! whae'er wad hae expeckit,
Your duty ye wad sae neglekit,
Ye wha were ne'er by lairds respeckit,
 To wear the plaid,
But by the brutes themselves cleekit,
 To be their guide.

What flock wi' Moodie's flock could rank,
Sae hale and hearty every shank !
Nae poisoned sour Arminian stank
 He let them taste,
Frac Calvin's well, aye clear, they drank—
 Oh sic a feast !

The thummart, wil'-cat, brock, and tod, pole-cat—badger—fox
Weel kenn'd his voice through a' the wood,
He smelt their ilka hole and road,
 Baith out and in,
And weel he liked to shed their bluid,
 And sell their skin.

¹ Brawl.

What herd like Russell telled his tale,
 His voice was heard through muir and dale,¹
 He kenn'd the L—'s sheep, ilk a tail,
 O'er a' the height,
 And saw gin they were sick or hale,
 At the first sight.

He fine a mangy sheep could scrub,
 Or nobly fling the Gospel club,
 And New-Light herds could nicely drub,
 Or pay their skin ;
 Could shake them o'er the burning dub,
 Or heave them in.

Sic twa—Oh do I live to sec 't,
 Sic famous twa should disagreet,
 And names like villain, hypocrite,
 Ilk ither gi'en,
 While New-Light herds, wi' laughin' spite,
 Say neither's liein' !

A' ye wha tent the Gospel fauld,
 There's Duncan,² deep, and Peebles, shaul,³
 But chiefly thou, apostle Auld,⁴
 We trust in thee,
 That thou wilt work them, het and cauld,
 Till they agree.

Consider, sirs, how we're beset ;
 There's scarce a new herd that we get,
 But comes frac 'mang that cursèd set
 I winna name ;
 I hope frae heaven to see them yet
 In fiery flame.

Dalrymple⁵ has been lang our fae,
 M'Gill⁶ has wrought us meikle wac,

¹ There was a literal truth in this line, for a person who sometimes attended Russell's prelections affirmed, that in a favourable state of the atmosphere, his voice, when he was holding forth in the open air at sacraments, might be heard at the distance of upwards of a mile.

² Dr Robert Duncan, minister of Dundonald.

³ Rev. William Peebles, of Newton-upon-Ayr. See notes to *Holy Fair* and *Kirk's Alarm*.

⁴ Rev. William Auld, minister of Mauchline.

⁵ Rev. Dr Dalrymple, one of the ministers of Ayr. He died in 1814, having filled his charge for the uncommon period of sixty-eight years. He had baptised Burns.

⁶ Rev. William M'Gill, one of the ministers of Ayr, colleague of Dr Dalrymple. See note to *Kirk's Alarm*.

And that cursed rascal ca'd M'Quhae,¹
 And baith the Shaws,²
 That aft hae made us black and blae,
 Wi' vengefu' paws.

Auld Wodrow³ lang has hatched mischief,
 We thought aye death wad bring relief,
 But he has gotten, to our grief,
 Ane to succeed him,
 A chield wha'll soundly buff our beef;
 I meikle dread him.

And monie aane that I could tell,
 Wha fain would openly rebel,
 Forby turn-coats amang oursel';
 There's Smith for aane,⁴
 I doubt he's but a gray-nick quill,
 And that ye'll fin'.

Oh a' ye flocks o'er a' the hills,
 By mosses, meadows, moors, and fells,
 Come, join your counsel and your skills
 To cewe the lairds,
 And get the brutes the powers themsel's
 To choose their herds.

Then Orthodoxy yet may prance,
 And Learning in a woody dance,
 And that fell cur ca'd Common Sense,
 That bites sae sair,
 Be banished o'er the sea to France:
 Let him bark there.

halter

Then Shaw's and D'rymple's eloquence,
 M'Gill's close nervous excellence,

¹ Minister of St Quivox, an enlightened man, and elegant preacher.

² Dr Andrew Shaw of Craigie, and Dr David Shaw of Coylton. Dr Andrew was a man of excellent abilities, but extremely diffident—a fine speaker, and an accomplished scholar. Dr David, in personal respects, was a prodigy. He was ninety-one years of age before he required an assistant. At that period of life he read without the use of glasses, wrote a neat small hand, and had not a furrow in his cheek or a wrinkle in his brow. He was Moderator of the General Assembly in 1775. This amiable man died April 26, 1810, in the ninety-second year of his age, and sixty-first of his ministry.

³ There were three brothers of this name, descended from the church historian, and all ministers—one at Eastwood, their ancestor's charge; the second at Stevenston; and the third, Dr Peter Wodrow, at Torbolton. Dr Peter is the person named in the poem. The assistant and successor mentioned in the verse was M'Math, elsewhere alluded to.

⁴ Rev. Mr Smith, minister of Galston. He is one of the tent-preachers in the *Holy Fair*.

M'Quhae's pathetic manly sense,
 And guid M'Math,
 Wi' Smith, wha through the heart can glance,
 May a' pack aff.

In the three last verses, the poet glances satirically at the demands made by the Old-Light party to obtain for congregations the right of choosing their own ministers, as opposite to the plan of their appointment by patrons, which had been reigning for several ages. The anti-patronage cause was almost identified with that of the Old Light, and for this reason Burns had no sympathies with it.

The poet tells us that the *Twa Herds* was the first of his poetic offspring which saw the light. 'I had,' he says, 'a notion that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst [the possibility of its being condemned as stupid], I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who could be the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause.'

The date of this event appears to be April 1785, the era of the letters to Lapraik, and probably very little after that of *Hornbook*. One Patrick Simpson carried a copy of the poem to his home in Ochiltree parish, a few miles south of Mauchline. By Patrick it was communicated to his brother, William Simpson, the parish schoolmaster, and a rhymer, who was immediately prompted to address a versified epistle to Burns, having probably heard the satire attributed to him. This was quickly answered by Burns in a beautiful poem, expressive of his intense love of nature and of country; to which, moreover, was appended a clever allegorical description of the heresy which he had adopted. In the expression, 'Our herds,' and the whole strain of this allegory, the reader will now see a connection of circumstances leading on from the *Holy Tulzie*, and confirming the present narration:—

TO WILLIAM S [IMPSON],

OCHILTREE.

May 1785.

I gat your letter, winsome Willie;
 Wi' gratefu' heart I thank you brawly;
 Though I maun say 't, I wad be silly,
 And unco vain,
 Should I believe, my coaxin' billie,
 heartily
 Your flatterin' strain,
 fellow

But I 'se believe ye kindly meant it,
 I sud be laith to think ye hinted
 Ironic satire, sidelins sklented
 On my poor Music;
 Though in sic phrasin' terms ye 've penned it, cajoling
 I scaree excuse ye.

obliquely directed

My senses wad be in a creel,¹
 Should I but dare a hope to speel
 Wi' Allan² or wi' Gilbertfield,³
 The braces o' fame;
 Or Fergusson, the writer chiel,
 A deathless name.

basket
climb

lad

(Oh, Fergusson ! thy glorious parts
 Ill suited law's dry musty arts !
 My curse upon your whunstane hearts,
 Ye E'nbrugh gentry ;
 The tithe o' what ye waste at cartes
 Wad stowed his pantry !)

Yet when a tale comes i' my head,
 Or lasses gie my heart a sereed,
 As whiles they're like to be my dead,
 (Oh sad disease !)
 I kittle up my rustic reed ;
 It gies me ease.

rent

finger

Auld Coila⁴ now may fidge fu' fain,
 She 's gotten poets o' her ain,
 Chickls wha their chanters winna hain,
 But tune their lays,
 Till echoes a' resound again
 Her weel-sung praise.

hug herself

Youths—spare

Nae poet thought her worth his while,
 To set her name in measured style ;
 She lay like some unkenn'd-of isle
 Beside New Holland,
 Or whare wild-meeting oceans boil
 Besouth Magellan.

¹ In Scotland, when a person is much exalted and mystified about anything, he is said to be in a creel.

² Allan Ramsay.

³ William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, a Scottish poet contemporary with Ramsay.

⁴ The district of Kyle, personified under the appellation of Coila. Burns afterwards assumed Coila as the name of his Muse.

Ramsay and famous Fergusson
 Gied Forth and Tay a lift aboon ;
 Yarrow and Tweed, to monie a tunc,
 Owre Scotland rings ;
 While Irwin, Lugar, Ayr, and Doon,
 Naebody sings.

Th' Illissus, Tiber, Thames, and Seine,
 Glide sweet in monie a tunefu' linc ;
 But, Willie, set your fit to mine,
 And cock your crest,
 We'll gar our streams and burnies shine rivulets
 Up wi' the best !

We'll sing auld Coila's plains and fells, mountains
 Her moors red-brown wi' heather-bells,
 Her banks and braes, her dens and dells,
 Where glorious Wallace
 Aft bure the gree, as story tells, bore the bell
 Frae southron billies.

At Wallace' name what Scottish blood
 But boils up in a spring-tide flood !
 Oft have our fearless fathers strode
 By Wallace' side,
 Still pressing onward, red-wat shod,
 Or glorious died !

O sweet are Coila's haughs and woods meadows
 When lintwhites chant amang the buds,
 And jinkin' hares, in amorous whids,¹ linnets
 Their loves enjoy,
 While through the braes the cushat croods coos
 With wailfu' cry !

Even winter bleak has charms to me
 When winds rave through the naked tree ;
 Or frosts on hills of Ochiltree
 Are hoary gray :
 Or blinding drifts wild furious flee,
 Darkening the day !

O Nature ! a' thy shows and forms
 To feeling, pensive hearts hae charms !
 Whether the summer kindly warms,
 Wi' life and light,
 Or winter howls, in gusty storms,
 The lang, dark night !

¹ A word expressive of the quick, nimble movements of the hare, which hence is sometimes called a *whiddie* in Scotland.

The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
Till by himsel' he learned to wander,
Adown some trotting burn's meander,
 And no think lang;
O sweet, to stray and pensive ponder
 A heartfelt sang!

found

The warly race may drudge and drive,
Hog-shouther, jundie, stretch and strive;
Let me fair Nature's face descrie,
 And I wi' pleasure,
Shall let the busy grumbling hive
 Bum owre their treasure.

push

Fareweel, 'my rhyme-composing brither!'
We've been owre lang unkenn'd to ither:
Now let us lay our heads thegither,
 In love fraternal;
May Envy wallop in a tether,
 Black fiend, infernal!

While Highlandmen hate tolls and taxes;
While moorlan' herds like guid fat braxies,¹
While terra firma on her axis
 Diurnal turns,
Count on a friend, in faith and practise,
 In ROBERT BURNS.

POSTSCRIPT.

My memory's no worth a preen;
I had amaist forgotten clean,
Ye bade me write you what they mean
 By this New Light,
'Bout which our herds sae aft hae been
 Maist like to fight.

pin

In days when mankind were but callans
At grammar, logic, and sic talents,
They took nae pains their speech to balance,
 Or rules to gie,
But spak their thoughts in plain braid lallans, lowland speech
 Like you or me.

boys

¹ Dead sheep—a perquisite of the shepherd.

In thae auld times, they thought the moon,
Just like a sark, or pair o' shoon,
Wore by degrees, till her last roon
 Gaed past their viewing,
And shortly after she was done,
 They gat a new one.

shirt—shoes
paring

This passed for certain—undisputed ;
It ne'er cam i' their heads to doubt it,
Till chiels gat up, and wad confute it,
 And ca'd it wrang ;
And muckle din there was about it,
 Baith loud and lang.

Some herds, well learned upo' the beuk,
Wad threap auld folk the thing misteuk ;
For 'twas the auld moon turned a neuk,
 And out o' sight,
And backlins-comin', to the leuk
 She grew mair bright.

assert

This was denied—it was affirmed ;
The herds and hirscls were alarmed,
The reverend gray-beards raved and stormed
 That beardless laddies
Should think they better were informed
 Than their auld daddies.

flocks

fathers

Frae less to mair, it gaed to sticks ;
Frae words and aiths to clours and nicks,
And mony a fallow gat his licks,
 Wi' hearty crunt ;
And some, to learn them for their tricks,
 Were hanged and brunt.

blows and cuts
beating
dint

This game was played in monie lands,
And Auld-Light caddies bure sic hands,
That, faith, the youngsters took the sands
 Wi' nimble shanks,
Till lairds forbade, by strict commands,
 Sic bluddy pranks.

fellows

But New-Light herds gat sic a cewe,
Folk thought them ruined stick-and-stowe,
Till now amaist on every knowe
 Ye 'll find ane placed ;
And some their New-Light fair avow,
 Just quite barefaced.

completely
hillock

Nae doubt the Auld-Light flocks are bleatin';
 Their zealous herds are vexed and sweatin';
 Mysel' I 've even seen them greetin'
 Wi' girnin' spite,
 To hear the moon sae sadly lied on
 By word and write.

But shortly they will cewe the loons !
 Some Auld-Light herds in neebor towns
 Are mind't in things they ca' balloons
 To tak a flight,
 And stay ae month among the moons,
 And see them right.

rascals

Guid observation they will gie them ;
 And when the auld moon's gaun to lea'e them,
 The hindmost shaird, they 'll fetch it wi' them,
 Just i' their pouch,
 And when the New-Light billies see them,
 I think they 'll crouch !

fragment

Sac, ye observe that a' this clatter
 Is naething but a ' moonshine matter ;'
 But though dull prose-folk Latin splatter
 In logic tulzie,
 I hope we bardies ken some better
 Than mind sic brulzie.

contention

broil

To this period seems to be applicable an anecdote related by Professor Walker. After observing that Burns, while still unknown as a poet, numbered several clergymen among his acquaintance, he goes on to say :—‘One of these communicated to me a circumstance which conveys more forcibly than many words an idea of the impression made upon his mind by the powers of the poet. This gentleman, after entering on the clerical profession, had repeatedly met Burns in company, when the acuteness and originality displayed by the latter, the depth of his discernment, the force of his expressions, and the authoritative energy of his understanding, had created in the former a sense of his power, of the extent of which he was unconscious till revealed to him by accident. The second time that he appeared in the pulpit, he came with an assured and tranquil mind, and though a few persons of education were present, he advanced some length in the service with his confidence and self-possession unimpaired ; but when he observed Burns, who was of a different parish, unexpectedly enter the church, he was instantly affected with a tremor and

embarrassment which suddenly apprised him of the impression his mind, unknown to itself, had previously received. He now discovered that in their former interviews he had been gradually and imperceptibly measuring the strength of that intellectual giant, before whom he was now to exhibit his own. When it is added that the person thus affected had good abilities, improved by a careful education, and that he had also more than the ordinary portion of constitutional firmness, we may be able to conceive the degree of respect which was inspired by the talents of the unlettered ploughman, before he had been advanced to precedence by any public honours.'

It has lately been revealed that the clergyman here alluded to was the Rev. Dr Niven, afterwards minister of Dunkeld, but then only a young licentiate of divinity, acting as preceptor in the family of Mr Hamilton of Sundrum, in the neighbouring parish of Coylton. An anecdote is added on the report of Dr Niven's son. His father was sent to endeavour to bring Burns to join a party of friends at a certain hour. He found the poet engaged in thrashing. 'The message being delivered, Burns said he could not get through his thrashing in time, but added: "If you will take that *flail* and help me, I may be able to go." The doctor, a tall, powerful man, instantly threw off his coat, seized the flail, and thrashed with good-will. The thrashing was finished in time, and Burns went to the party.'¹

We may be very sure, from the language of Burns himself, that the moment it was determined, by the roar of applause, that the *Twa Herds* was 'clever,' he no longer attempted to conceal the authorship. It obtained for him the friendship of several of the neighbouring clergy of moderate character, as the Shaws, M'Quhae, and in particular the young preacher, Mr M'Math, who had lately come to Torbolton to act as assistant to the minister of that parish. In Burns's own parish of Mauchline, the minister, Mr Auld, or, as the poet irreverently called him, *Daddy Auld*, was a rigid Whig, or partisan of the Auld Light. From him, therefore, the poet could only look for reprobation, if not hostility. Amongst the laity of his neighbourhood, he had no friend more sympathetic than his own landlord, Mr Gavin Hamilton, the Mauchline *writer*, a generous-hearted, upright man, but whose religious character did not come up to the standard of Mr Auld. Hamilton had some time before been in trouble with the parish

¹ Wood's *Collection of Scottish Songs*, iii. 184.

session or consistory, on account of defects in his religious practice. For southern readers, it must be explained that the Scottish kirk-session, consisting of the minister and his staff of lay-elders, possesses a right of discipline over members of the flock, the instrument of authority practically consisting in this—that if displeased with the life or sentiments of any one, they can withhold from him permission to take the sacrament, and thus expose him to public obloquy. It is said that the minister of Mauchline, who was, on the whole, an amiable and worthy man, would never have himself assailed Gavin Hamilton. He was, however, so unfortunate as to listen to, and act upon, the insinuations of one who was a member of his session, as well as its clerk, and who had a personal spite at Hamilton, in consequence of some dispute about the levying of a poor-rate. In August 1784, just before the annual celebration of the communion, the session resolved that certain parishioners should be remonstrated with on the score of their habitual neglect of public ordinances. Mr Hamilton, learning what had taken place, and believing that he himself was the person chiefly in view, sent the session a letter, plainly telling them that they must be conscious that they proceeded upon no just grounds of offence against him, but purely on ‘private pique and ill-nature.’ They fired at this, but without being able immediately to vindicate their dignity, for, in January, Mr Hamilton was successful in an appeal for the protection of the next superior court—the presbytery of Ayr. They, however, cited Mr Hamilton on the following charges:—That he still neglects to attend church, having been absent two Sundays in the past, and three in the present month; that on the third Sunday of the present month, he set out on a journey to Carrick, although admonished against so doing by the minister; that he habitually, if not totally, neglects the worship of God in his family; and, finally, that he had written an abusive letter to the session. It gives a curious idea of the practices of those days, that the session enters the names of five former and three present servants of Mr Hamilton who may be cited to give evidence on some of these charges. He produced an order from the presbytery ordering the erasure of the session minutes of which he had complained. They then carried the affair by appeal before the next higher court—the synod. We cannot follow it through all its windings; but at length it terminated in July 1785, when the session granted Mr Hamilton a certificate of being free from all ground of church censure; so that he was substantially the victor.

It appears, that on the final appearance of the case before the presbytery, Mr Hamilton's agent, Mr Robert Aiken, writer in Ayr, exercised the oratorical talents for which he was locally remarkable, in exposing the secret motives of the prosecution, and the conduct of the session, one member of which appears to have been a very wretched creature. Burns had looked on with feelings keenly excited in favour of Gavin, whom he regarded as a noble-hearted man wronged by a set of malicious bigots; and he soon after produced a satire, nominally aimed at the particular elder here alluded to, commonly called *Holy Willie*, but in reality a burlesque of the extreme doctrinal views of the party to which he belonged:—

HOLY WILLIE'S PRAYER.

Oh Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
 Wha, as it pleases best thyself,
 Sends aye to heaven, and ten to hell,
 A' for thy glory,
 And no for ony guid or ill
 They've done afore thee!

I bless and praise thy matchless might,
 Whan thousands thou hast left in night,
 That I am here afore thy sight,
 For gifts and grace,
 A burnin' and a shinin' light
 To a' this place.

What was I, or my generation,
 That I should get sic exaltation,
 I wha deserve sic just damnation
 For broken laws,
 Five thousand years 'fore my creation,
 Through Adam's cause.

When frac my mither's womb I fell,
 Thou might hae plunged me in hell,
 To gnash my gums, to weep and wail,
 In burning lake,
 Whare d—d devils roar and yell,
 Chained to a stake.

Yet I am here a chosen sample;
 To shew thy grace is great and ample;
 I'm here a pillar in thy temple,
 Strong as a rock,
 A guide, a buckler, an example,
 To a' thy flock.

But yet, oh L— ! confess I must,
 At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust ;
 And sometimes too wi' warldly trust,
 Vile self gets in ;
 But thou remembers we are dust,
 Defiled in sin.

troubled

* * *

Maybe thou lets this fleshly thorn,
 Beset thy servant e'en and morn,
 Lest he owre high and proud should turn,
 'Cause he's sae gifted ;
 If sae, thy hand maun e'en be borne,
 Until thou lift it.

L—, bless thy chosen in this place,
 For here thou hast a chosen race :
 But G— confound their stubborn face,
 And blast their name,
 Wha bring thy elders to disgraee
 And public shame.

L—, mind Gawn Hamilton's deserts,
 He drinks, and swears, and plays at cartes,
 Yet has sae monie takin' arts,
 Wi' grit and sma',
 Frae G—'s ain priests the people's hearts
 He steals awa'.

And whan we chasen'd him therefor,
 Thou kens how he bred sic a splore,
 As set the warld in a roar
 O' laughin' at us :
 Curse thou his basket and his store,
 Kail and potatoes.

disturbance

L—, hear my earnest cry and prayer,
 Against the presbyt'ry of Ayr ;
 Thy strong right hand, L—, mak it bare
 Upo' their heads,
 L—, weigh it down, and dinna spare,
 For their misdeeds.

Oh L—, my G—, that glib-tongued Aiken,
 My very heart and saul are quakin',
 To think how we stood groanin', shakin',
 And swat wi' dread,
 While he wi' hingin' lip and snakin',
 Held up his head.

L—, in the day of vengeance try him,
 L—, visit them wha did employ him,
 And pass not in thy mercy by 'em,
 Nor hear their prayer ;
 But for thy people's sake destroy 'em,
 And dinna spare.

(But, L—, remember me and mine,
 Wi' mercies temp'ral and divine,
 That I for gear and grace may shine,
 Excelled by nane,
 And a' the glory shall be thine,
 Amen, Amen !

EPITAPII ON HOLY WILLIE.

Here Holy Willie's sair-worn clay
 Taks up its last abode ;
 His saul has ta'en some other way,
 I fear the left-hand road.

Stop ! there he is, as sure 's a gun,
 Poor silly body, see him ;
 Nae wonder he 's as black 's the grun',
 Observe wha 's standing wi' him.

Your bruntane devilship, I see,
 Has got him there before ye ;
 But haud your nine-tail cat a wee, little
 Till ance you 've heard my story.

Your pity I will not implore,
 For pity ye hae nane ;
 Justice, alas ! has gien him o'er,
 And mercy's day is gane.

But hear me, sir, deil as ye are,
 Look something to your credit ;
 A coof like him wad stain your name, fool
 If it were kent ye did it.

The strength of satire here employed needs no comment. That Burns did not misrepresent the man whom he selected for vengeance is proved by events, for Holy Willie was afterwards found guilty of secreting money from the church-offerings, and he closed his miserable life in a ditch, into which he had fallen in going home from a debauch. The Rev. Hamilton Paul defends the

poem as a just exposure of an odious interpretation of Christianity; and Mr Lockhart, commenting on Mr Paul, says: ‘That performances so blasphemous should have been not only pardoned, but applauded by ministers of religion, is a singular circumstance, which may go far to make the reader comprehend the exaggerated state of party-feeling in Burns’s native county at the period when he first appealed to the public ear. Nor is it fair,’ he adds, ‘to pronounce sentence upon the young and reckless satirist, without taking into consideration the undeniable fact, that in his worst offences of this kind, he was encouraged and abetted by those who, to say nothing more about their professional character and authority, were almost the only persons of liberal education whose society he had any opportunity of approaching at the period in question.’¹

In connection with these remarks, it may be as well for the reader to be aware, that in writing his poems against the religious party to which he was opposed, Burns set at naught the earnest advices of his mother and brother. He was disposed on most occasions to listen deferentially to these friends of his bosom; but on this point he was obstinate, to their great and lasting regret. The strength of the feeling under which he acted fully appears in the letter to Mr M’Math, onward. ‘He went mad at their grimaces,’ &c.

The harvest of 1785 was beset by wretched weather, and was very late. On Mossiel the half of the crop was lost, a circumstance seriously affecting the prospects of Burns and his family. In two epistles of this period—one to his brother poet Lapraik, the other to a clerical friend—the bard alludes to the evil season, as well as to the ecclesiastical bickerings then going on:—

THIRD EPISTLE TO JOHN LAPRAIK.²

September 13, 1785.

Guid speed and furder to you, Johnny,
Guid health, hale han’s, and weather bonny ;
Now when ye’re nickan down fu’ canny cutting
 The staff o’ bread,
May ye ne’er want a stoup o’ bran’y
 To clear your head.

¹ See Appendix, No. 8.

² First published by Lapraik in a volume of his own poems.

May Boreas never thrash your rigs,
Nor kick your rickles aff their legs,
Sendin' the stuff o'er muirs and haggs
Like drivin' wrack ;
But may the tapmast grain that wags
Come to the sack.

ricks
mosses

I 'm bizzie too, and skelpin' at it,
But bitter, daudin' showers hae wat it,
Sae my auld stumpie pen I gat it
Wi' muckle wark,
And took my joeteleg and whatt it,
Like ony clark.

beating

knife—cut

It 's now twa month that I 'm your debtor,
For your braw, nameless, dateless letter,
Abusin' me for harsh ill-nature
On holy men,
While deil a hair yoursel' ye 're better,
But mair profane.

But let the kirk-folk ring their bells,
Let 's sing about our noble sel's ;
We 'll cry nae jads frac heathen hills
To help, or roose us,
But browster-wives and whisky-stills,
They are the muses.

praise

Your friendship, sir, I winna quat it,
And if ye mak objections at it,
Then han' in nieve some day we 'll knot it, fist
And witness take,
And when wi' usquebae we 've wat it,
It winna break.

But if the beast and branks be spared
Till kye be gaun without the herd,
And a' the vittel in the yard,
And theekit right,
I mean your ingle-side to guard
Ac winter-night.

cows

thatched

Then muse-inspirin' aqua vitae
Shall make us baith sae blithe and witty,
Till ye forget ye 're auld and gutty,
And be as canty
As ye were nine year less than thretty—
Sweet ane-and-twenty !

big-bellied

But stooks are cowpit wi' the blast,
And now the sinn keeks in the west,
Then I maun rin amang the rest,
 And quat my chanter;
Sae I subscribe myself in haste
Yours, RAB THE RANTER.¹

overturned
peeps

EPISTLE TO THE REV. JOHN M'MATH.²

September 17, 1785.

While at the stuck the shcarers cower
To shun the bitter blauidin' shower,
Or in gulravage rinnin' scower
 To pass the time,
To you I dedicate the hour
 In idle rhyme.

shock—reapers
beating
confusion

My Music, tired wi' monie a sonnet
On gown, and ban', and douce black bonnet, grave
Is grown right cerie, now she's done it, fearful
 Lest they should blame her,
And rouse their holy thunder on it,
 And anathem her.

I own 'twas rash, and rather hardy,
That I, a simple, country bardie,
Should meddle wi' a pack sac sturdy,
 Wha, if they ken me,
Can easy, wi' a single wordie,
 Lowse h— upon me.

But I gae mad at their grimaces,
Their sighin', cantin', grace-proud faces,
Their three-mile prayers, and hauf-mile graces,
 Their raxin' conscience, stretching
Whase greed, revenge, and pride disgraces
 Waur nor their nonsense.

¹ A sobriquet borrowed from the clever old Scotch song, *Maggie Lauder*.

² At that time enjoying the appointment of *assistant and successor* to the Rev. Peter Wodrow, minister of Torbolton. He was an excellent preacher, and a decided moderate. He enjoyed the friendship of the Montgomeries of Coilsfield, and of Burns, but unhappily fell into low spirits, in consequence of his dependent situation, and became dissipated. He died in obscurity at Rossul, in the Isle of Mull, December 1825.

There's Gawn,¹ misca't waur than a beast,
 Wha has mair honour in his breast
 Than mony scores as guid's the priest
 Wha sae abus't him ;
 And may a bard no crack his jest
 What way they've use't him ?

See him, the poor man's friend in need,
 The gentleman in word and deed,
 And shall his fame and honour bleed
 By worthless skellums,
 And not a Muse erect her head
 To cewe the blellums ?

wretches

fellows

O Pope, had I thy satire's darts
 To gie the rascals their deserts,
 I'd rip their rotten, hollow hearts,
 And tell aloud
 Their jugglin' hocus-pocus arts
 To cheat the crowd.

G— knows I'm no the thing I should be,
 Nor am I even the thing I could be,
 But twenty times I rather would be
 An atheist clean,
 Than under gospel colours hid be
 Just for a screen.

An honest man may like a glass,
 An honest man may like a lass,
 But mean revenge, and malice fause,
 He'll still disdain,
 And then cry zeal for gospel laws,
 Like some we ken.

false

They take religion in their mouth ;
 They talk o' mercy, grace, and truth,
 For what? to gie their malice skouth
 On some puir wight,
 And hunt him down, o'er right and ruth,
 To ruin straight.

scope

All hail, Religion! maid divine !
 Pardon a Muse sae mean as mine,
 Who in her rough imperfect line,
 Thus daurs to name thee ;
 To stigmatise false friends of thine
 Can nc'er defame thee.

¹ Gavin Hamilton.

Though blotch't and foul wi' mony a stain,
 And far unworthy of thy train,
 With trembling voice I tune my strain
 To join with those
 Who boldly daur thy cause maintain
 In spite o' foes :

In spite o' crowds, in spite o' mobs,
 In spite o' undermining jobs,
 In spite o' dark banditti stabs
 At worth and merit,
 By scoundrels, even wi' holy robes,
 But hellish spirit.

O Ayr! my dear, my native ground,
 Within thy presbyterian bound
 A candid liberal band is found
 Of public teachers,
 As men, as Christians too, renowned,
 And manly preachers.

Sir, in that circle you are named ;
 Sir, in that circle you are famed ;
 And some, by whom your doctrine's blamed
 (Which gies you honour),
 Even, sir, by them your heart's esteemed,
 And winning manner.

Pardon this freedom I have ta'en,
 And if impertinent I've been,
 Impute it not, good sir, in aye
 Whase heart ne'er wranged ye,
 But to his utmost would befriend
 Ought that belanged ye.

The meagre harvest of '85 was gathered, and Robert and Gilbert Burns must have begun to entertain serious misgivings regarding their prospects. Robert, we have seen, was by this time made aware that he could write so as to draw the approbation of something above a rustic audience. His brother, possessed, like himself, of a cultivated mind and literary taste far above the common world, was at his side to whisper what must have been a precious applause, when, in the intervals of labour, he recited some of those verses, yet fresh from the mint of his glowing mind, which have since been the rapture of multitudes, and the burden of a nation's acclaim. Gilbert tells us, that in the course of a Sunday-walk, the poet repeated to him the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and he was

electrified by it. ‘The fifth, sixth, and eighteenth stanzas thrilled with ecstasy through his soul.’ Can we suppose that Robert would hear the expression of such feelings from a brother whom he knew to be a highly intelligent and reflecting person, without being stirred up into some fond apprehensions of the possibility of succeeding as a poet, and even by poetry mending in some degree fortunes on which all common industrial exertions seemed to be thrown away? And it may be asked, if it be quite possible for any man, in whatever circumstances, to possess the power of pouring forth such verses as those of the *Cotter’s Saturday Night*, without some consciousness that he can command the attention of his fellow-creatures? Scarcely, we suspect. And, indeed, he himself tells us, that by weighing himself against others, he had come to as great confidence in the merit of his poems before their publication, as he ever had afterwards when they had received the stamp of public approbation. We, therefore, deem it more than merely likely, that before the end of this year the notion of publishing had come upon Burns, and that he began accordingly to exert himself vigorously in the composition of poems not strictly, as for the most part hitherto, occasional. ‘Holding the plough,’ we are told by Gilbert, ‘was a favourite situation with Robert for poetic composition, and some of his best verses were produced while he was at that exercise.’ The ploughing for winter-wheat began in November, and Burns had then, of course, an opportunity of subjecting himself to the stimulus so favourable to his Muse. That he took due advantage of it, or was very soon after at least engaged in composing some of his most important poems, appears from a letter which he addressed in February 1786 to his young friend John Richmond. On the strength of this information, and from other circumstances, we set down as the composition of the latter autumn and early winter the following brilliant series of compositions:—*To a Mouse*, *Halloween*, *Man was made to Mourn*, *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*, *Address to the Deil*, *The Jolly Beggars*, *To James Smith*, *The Vision*, *The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer*, *The Twa Dogs*, *The Ordination*, and *Scotch Drink*—being, in fact, the principal basis of the fame which the bard subsequently attained. Such an amount of literary industry is uncommon with all; it was unprecedented in Burns, whose previous verses were usually prompted by the passion or whim of the hour. But now, if our theory is correct, the bard of Mossgiel had an end in view for his writings. That such was indeed the case—though hitherto it does not appear in his biography—is in a manner affirmed by his

confidant, Gilbert, who expressly says, that '*The Twa Dogs*' was composed after the resolution of publishing was nearly taken.' *The Twa Dogs*, we see, was executed before February 17, 1786, a date some considerable time anterior to that at which the resolution of publishing is usually said to have been formed.

Some interest must necessarily attach to the personal circumstances of Burns at the time when he was pouring forth these immortal lays. Sir William Allan has, with poetical feeling, painted the peasant-bard seated at study, in his ordinary working-attire, and with a pen in his hand: he represents him sitting in a roomy apartment, where many articles customarily seen in a comfortable farmhouse are scattered about. The conception of the scene appears sufficiently humble; but I am assured that it greatly exceeds the reality in point of dignity.

The farmhouse of Mossiel, which still exists nearly as in the days of the poet, consists mainly of a kitchen and parlour, both containing several beds. Almost the only other apartment in the house is a kind of garret-closet, accessible by a narrow trap-stair ascending from the lobby. This little room is sufficiently lighted by a window of four small panes, set in the sloping roof by which the internal space is contracted fully a third. Mrs Begg relates that her two brothers occupied a small curtainless bed in this apartment. Under the window, the poet had a little deal-table, in which there was a drawer. It was here he transcribed the verses which for the most part he had composed in the fields. Often did his youngest sister steal up, after he had gone out to his afternoon labour, to search the drawer for the verses he had just written off. One cannot but take a pleasure in such particulars, as shewing in so striking a light the independence of the spirit of man on the humble or trivial circumstances by which its earthly tabernacle may be surrounded.

TO A MOUSE,

ON TURNING UP HER NEST WITH THE PLOUGH, NOVEMBER 1785.

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,
Oh what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa' sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin and chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!¹

hasty clatter

¹ The stick used for clearing away the clods from the plough.

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
 Has broken Nature's social union,
 And justifies that ill opinion,
 Which makes thee startle
 At me, thy poor earthborn companion,
 And fellow-mortal !

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve ;
 What then ? poor beastie, thou maun live !
 A daimen icker in a thrave¹
 'S a sma' request :
 I'll get a blessin' wi' the laive,
 And never miss 't !

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin !
 Its silly wa's the win's are strewin' !
 And naething now to big a new ane
 O' foggage green,
 And bleak December's winds ensuin',
 Baith snell and keen !

Thou saw the fields laid bare and waste,
 And weary winter comin' fast,
 And cozie here, beneath the blast,
 Thou thought to dwell,
 Till, crash ! the cruel coulter passed
 Out through thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves and stibble,
 Has cost thee mony a weary nibble !
 Now thou's turned out for a' thy trouble,
 But house or hald,
 To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
 And cranreuch cauld !

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
 In proving foresight may be vain :
 The best-laid schemes o' mice and men,
 Gang aft a-gley,
 And lea'e us nought but grief and pain,
 For promised joy.

Still thou art blest, compared wi' me !
 The present only toucheth thee :
 But, och ! I backward cast my e'e,
 On prospects drear !
 And forward, though I canna see,
 I guess and fear.

¹ An occasional ear of corn in a thrave—that is, twenty-four sheaves.

sometimes

rest

build

sharp

comfortable

 Without—hold
 endure
 hoar-frost

We have the testimony of Gilbert Burns that this beautiful poem was composed while the author was following the plough. Burns ploughed with four horses, being twice the amount of power now required on most of the soils of Scotland. He required an assistant called a *gaudsman*, to drive the horses, his own duty being to hold and guide the plough. John Blane, who had acted as gaudsman to Burns, and who lived sixty years afterwards, had a distinct recollection of the turning up of the mouse. Like a thoughtless youth as he was, he ran after the creature to kill it, but was checked and recalled by his master, who, he observed, became thereafter thoughtful and abstracted. Burns, who treated his servants with the familiarity of fellow-labourers, soon after read the poem to Blane.

HALLOWEEN.¹

The following poem will, by many readers, be well enough understood; but for the sake of those who are unacquainted with the manners and traditions of the country where the scene is cast, notes are added, to give some account of the principal charms and spells of that night, so big with prophecy to the peasantry in the west of Scotland. The passion of prying into futurity, makes a striking part of the history of human nature in its rude state, in all ages and nations; and it may be some entertainment to a philosophic mind, if any such should honour the author with a perusal, to see the remains of it among the more unenlightened in our own.

'Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
The simple pleasures of the lowly train;
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm, than all the gloss of art.'

GOLDSMITH.—*B.*

Upon that night, when fairies light,
On Cassilis Downans² dance,
Or owre the lays, in splendid blaze,
On sprightly coursers prance;
Or for Colean the route is ta'en,
Beneath the moon's pale beams;
There, up the Cove³ to stray and rove
Amang the rocks and streams
To sport that night.

fields

¹ [All Hallow Eve, or the eve of All Saints' Day,] is thought to be a night when witches, devils, and other mischief-making beings, are all abroad on their baneful midnight errands; particularly those aerial people, the fairies, are said on that night to hold a grand anniversary.—*B.*

² Certain little romantic, rocky, green hills, in the neighbourhood of the ancient seat of the Earls of Cassilis.—*B.*

³ A noted cavern near Colean House, called the Cove of Colean; which, as well as Cassilis Downans, is famed in country story for being a favourite haunt of fairies.—*B.*

The lassesfeat, and cleanly neat,	trim
Mair braw than when they're fine;	
Their faces blithe, fu' sweetly kythe,	shew
Hearts leal, and warm, and kin':	true
The lads sae trig, wi' wooer-babs	spruce
Weel knotted on their garten,	
Some unco blate, and some wi' gabs	bashful—talk
Gar lasses' hearts gang startin'	
Whiles fast at night.	

¹ The famous family of that name, the ancestors of Robert, the great deliverer of his country, were Earls of Carrick.—B.

² The first ceremony of Halloween is, pulling each a stock, or plant of kail. They must go out, hand in hand, with eyes shut, and pull the first they meet with: its being big or little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their spells—the husband or wife. If any yird or earth stick to the root, that is tocher or fortune; and the taste of the custoe—that is, the heart of the stem—is indicative of the natural temper and disposition. Lastly, the stems, or, to give them their ordinary appellation, the runts, are placed somewhere above the head of the door, and the Christian names of people whom chance brings into the house are, according to the priority of placing the runts, the names in question.—B.

The auld guidwife's weel-hoordit nits³
Are round and round divided ;
And mony lads' and lasses' fates
Are there that night decided :
Some kindle couthie, side by side,
And burn thegither trimly ;
Some start awa' wi' saucy pride,
And jump out-owre the chimlie
Fu' high that night.

Jean slips in twa wi' tentie c'e ;
Wha 'twas, she wadna tell ;
But this is Jock, and this is me,
She says in to hersel' :
He bleezed owre her, and she owre him,
As they wad never mair part ;
Till, fuff ! he started up the lum,
And Jean had e'en a sair heart
To see 't that night.

Poor Willie, wi' his bow-kail runt,
Was brunt wi' primsie Mallie;
And Mary, nae doubt, took the drunt,
To be compared to Willie.
Mall's nit lap out wi' pridefu' fling,
And her ain fit it brunt it;
While Willie lap, and swore, by jing,
'Twas just the way he wanted
To be that night.

¹ They go to the barn-yard, and pull each, at three several times, a stalk of oats. If the third stalk wants the top-pickle—that is, the grain at the top of the stalk—the party in question will not continue spotless until marriage.—B.

² When the corn is in a doubtful state, by being too green or wet, the stack-builder, by means of old timber, &c., makes a large apartment in his stack, with an opening in the side which is fairest expos'd to the wind: this he calls a fause-house.—*B.* That is, false-house; something only resembling a house.

³ Burning the nuts is a famous charm. They name the lad and lass to each particular nut as they lay them in the fire, and accordingly as they burn quietly together, or start from beside one another, the course and issue of the courtship will be.—*B.*

Nell had the fause-house in her min',
 She pits hersel' and Rob in;
 In loving bleeze they sweetly join,
 Till white in ase they 're sobbin'.
 Nell's heart was dancin' at the view,
 She whispered Rob to leuk for 't:
 Rob, stowlins, prie'd her bonny mou'
 Fu' cozic in the neuk for 't,
 Unseen that night.

stealthily kissed
snugly

But Merran sat behint their backs,
 Her thoughts on Andrew Bell;
 She lea'es them gashin' at their cracks,
 And slips out by hersel':
 She through the yard the nearest taks,
 And to the kiln she goes then,
 And darklins graipit for the baunks,
 And in the blue-clue¹ throws then,
 Right fear't that night.

conversing
cross-beams

And aye she win't, and aye she swat,
 I wat she made nae jaukin';
 Till something held within the pat,
 Guid L—! but she was quakin'!
 But whether 'twas the deil himsel',
 Or whether 'twas a bauk-en',
 Or whether it was Andrew Bell,
 She did na wait on talkin'
 To spier that night.

winded
dallying
inquire

Wee Jenny to her granny says:
 'Will ye go wi' me, granny?
 I 'll eat the apple² at the glass
 I gat frae Uncle Johnny: '
 She fuff't her pipe wi' sic a lunt
 In wrath she was sae vap'rin',
 She notic't na, an aizle brunt
 Her braw new worset apron
 Out through that night.

smoke
cinder

¹ Whoever would with success try this spell, must strictly observe these directions:—Steal out, all alone, to the kiln, and, darkling, throw into the pot a clue of blue yarn; wind it in a clue off the old one, and towards the latter end something will hold the thread; demand 'Wha hands?'—that is, Who holds? An answer will be returned from the kiln-pot, by naming the Christian and surname of your future spouse.—*B.*

² Take a candle, and go alone to a looking-glass; eat an apple before it, and, some traditions say, you should comb your hair all the time; the face of your conjugal companion to be, will be seen in the glass, as if peeping over your shoulder.—*B.*

‘Ye little skelpie-limmer’s face!¹
 I daur you try sic sportin’,
 As seek the foul thief ony place,
 For him to spae your fortune :
 Nae doubt but ye may get a sight !
 Great cause ye hae to fear it ;
 For mony aane has gotten a fright,
 And lived and died delecet
 On sic a night.

tell

‘Ae hairst afore the Sherra-moor—
 I mind’t as weel’s yestreen,
 I was a gilpey then, I’m sure
 I was na past fifteen :
 The simmer had been cauld and wat,
 And stuff was unco green ;
 And aye a rантин’ kirn we гat
 And just on Halloween
 It fell that night.

young girl

harvest-home

‘Our stibble-rig² was Rab M’Graen,
 A clever, sturdy fallow :
 His sin gat Eppie Sim wi’ wean,
 That lived in Achmacalla :
 He gat hemp-seed,³ I mind it weel,
 And he made unco light o’t ;
 But mony a day was by himsel’,
 He was sae sairly frightened
 That very night.’

Then up gat fechtin’ Jamie Fleck,
 And he swore by his conscience,
 That he could saw hemp-seed a peck ;
 For it was a’ but nonsense.
 The auld guidman raught down the pock, reached
 And out a handfu’ gied him ;
 Syne bad him slip frae ‘mang the folk,
 Some time when nae aane see’d him,
 And try’t that night.

¹ A technical term in female scolding.—*Burns’s Glossary.*

² The leader of the reapers.

³ Steal out, unperceived, and sow a handful of hemp-seed, harrowing it with anything you can conveniently draw after you. Repeat now and then: ‘Hemp-seed I saw thee, hemp-seed I saw thee ; and him (or her) that is to be my true love, come after me and pou thee.’ Look over your left shoulder, and you will see the appearance of the person invoked in the attitude of pulling hemp. Some traditions say: ‘Come after me, and shaw thee’—that is, shew thyself; in which case it simply appears. Others omit the harrowing, and say: ‘Come after me, and harrow thee.’—B.

He marches through amang the stacks,
 Though he was something sturtin ;
 The graip he for a harrow taks,
 And haurls at his curpin ;
 And every now and then he says :
 ‘ Hemp-seed, I saw thee,
 And her that is to be my lass,
 Come after me, and draw thee
 As fast this night.’

timorous
dung-fork
drags—rear

He whistled up Lord Lennox’ march,
 To keep his courage cheery ;
 Although his hair began to arch,
 He was sae fley’d and eerie :
 Till presently he hears a squeak,
 And then a grane and gruntle ;
 He by his shouther ga’e a keek,
 And tumbled wi’ a wintle
 Out-owre that night.

frightened
stagger

He roared a horrid murder-shout,
 In dreadfu’ desperation !
 And young and auld cam rinnin’ out,
 And hear the sad narration :
 He swore ’twas hilchin Jean M’Craw,
 Or crouchie Mcrran Humphie,
 Till, stop—she trotted through them a’—
 And wha was it but Grumphie
 Asteer that night !

halting
crook-backed

the pig

Meg fain wad to the barn hae gaen,
 To win three weelts o’ naething ;¹
 But for to meet the deil her lane,
 She pat but little faith in :
 She gies the herd a pickle nits,
 And twa red-cheikit apples,
 To watch, while for the barn she sets,
 In hopes to see Tam Kipples
 That very night.

corn-baskets

few

¹ This charm must likewise be performed unperceived, and alone. You go to the barn, and open both doors, taking them off the hinges if possible; for there is danger that the being about to appear may shut the doors, and do you some mischief. Then take that instrument used in winnowing the corn, which, in our country dialect, we call a wecht, and go through all the attitudes of letting down corn against the wind. Repeat it three times; and the third time an apparition will pass through the barn, in at the windy door, and out at the other, having both the figure in question, and the appearance or retinue, marking the employment or station in life.—B.

She turns the key wi' canny thraw,
And owre the threshold ventures ; gentle
But first on Sawny gies a ca',
Syne bauldly in she enters :
A ratton rattled up the wa',
And she cried, 'L—, preserve her !'
And ran through midden-hole and a',
And prayed wi' zeal and fervour,
Fu' fast that night.

They hoy't out Will, wi' sair adviee ; urged
They hecht him some fine braw ane ; promised
It chaneed, the stack he faddom't thrice,¹
Was timmer-propt for thrawin' ;
He taks a swirly auld moss oak knotty
For some black, grousome carlin ; odious-looking
And loot a winze, and drew a stroke,
Till skin in blypes cam haurlin'
Afl's nieves that night. shreds
hands

A wanton widow Leeczie was,
As eanty as a kittlin ;
But, oeh ! that night, amang the shaws, woods
She got a fearfu' settlin' !
She through the whins, and by the cairn, gorse
And owre the hill gaed scrieven,
Where three lairds' lands meet at a burn,²
To dip her left sark-sleeve in,
Was bent that night.

Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays,
As through the glen it wimpl't ; wheeled
Whyles round a rocky seaur it strays ; cliff
Whyles in a wiel it dimpl't ; eddy
Whyles glittered to the nightly rays,
Wi' bickering, dancing dazzle ;
Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
Below the spreading hazel,
Unseen that night.

¹ Take an opportunity of going, unnoticed, to a bean-stack, and fathom it three times round. The last fathom of the last time you will catch in your arms the appearance of your future conjugal yoke-fellow.—*B.*

² You go out, one or more, for this is a social spell, to a south running spring or rivulet, where 'three lairds' lands meet,' and dip your left shirt-sleeve. Go to bed in sight of a fire, and hang your wet sleeve before it to dry. Lie awake, and sometime near midnight an apparition, having the exact figure of the grand object in question, will come and turn the sleeve, as if to dry the other side of it.—*B.*

Amang the brackens, on the brae,
Between her and the moon,
The deil, or else an outler quey,
Gat up and gae a croon :
Poor Leezie's heart maist lap the hool ;
Near lav'rock-height she jumpit,
But mist a fit, and in the pool
Out-owre the lugs she plumpit,
Wi' a plunge that night.

fern
moan
sheath
lark

In order, on the clean hearth-stane,
The luggies three¹ are ranged,
And every time great care is ta'en
To see them duly changed :
Auld Uncle John, wha wedlock's joys
Sin' Mar's year² did desire,
Because he gat the toom dish thrice
He heaved them on the fire
In wrath that night.

empty

Wi' merry sangs, and friendly cracks,
I wat they did na weary ;
And unco tales, and funny jokes,
Their sports were cheap and cheery ;
Till buttered so'ns,³ wi' fragrant lunt,
Set a' their gabs a-steerin' ;
Syne, wi' a social glass o' strunt,
They parted aff careerin'
Fu' blithe that night.⁴

smoke
mouths
spirits

¹ Take three dishes; put clean water in one, foul water in another, leave the third empty; blindfold a person, and lead him to the hearth where the dishes are ranged; he (or she) dips the left hand—if by chance in the clean water, the future husband or wife will come to the bar of matrimony a maid; if in the foul, a widow; if in the empty dish, it foretells, with equal certainty, no marriage at all. It is repeated three times, and every time the arrangement of the dishes is altered.—*B.*

² The year 1715, when the Earl of Mar raised an insurrection in Scotland.

³ Sowens, with butter instead of milk to them, is always the Halloween supper.—*B.*

⁴ The most of the ceremonies appropriate to Halloween, including all those of an adventurous character, are now disused. Meetings of young people still take place on that evening, both in country and town, but their frolics are usually limited to ducking for apples in tubs of water—a ceremony overlooked by Burns—the lottery of the dishes, and pulling cabbage-stalks. The other ceremonies are discountenanced as more superstitious than is desirable, and somewhat dangerous. So lately as 1802, the following incident took place in Edinburgh on All-Hallow Eve:—A girl named Isobel Carr, servant to Mr Matthewson, typefounder, being determined to go through the rite of sowing hemp-seed, went for that purpose into her master's foundry about ten o'clock at night, having a light in her hand, which she placed on one of the tables while she performed her incantations. She walked through the shop several times,

Mr John Mayne, a comparatively obscure follower of the Scottish Muses, had attempted a poem on the subject of Halloween, forming twelve stanzas. It appeared in *Ruddiman's Weekly Magazine*, November 1780, and therefore may have been seen by Burns. That the Ayrshire poet actually saw and improved upon this composition can scarcely be doubted, after reading the following specimens :—

* * * *

'Ranged round a bleezing ingle-side,
Where nowther cauld nor hunger bide,
The farmer's house, wi' secret pride,
Will a' convene * * *

Placed at their head the guidwife sits,
And deals round apples, pears, and nits,
Syne tells her guests how, at sic bits,
Where she has been,
Bogles hae gart folk tyne their wits
At Halloween.

lose

* * * *

A' things prepared in order due,
Gosh guide's ! what fearfu' pranks ensue !
Some i' the kiln-pat thraw a clue,
At whilk, bedeen,
Their sweethearts at the far-end pu',
At Halloween.

* * * *

But 'twere a langsome tale to tell
The gates o' ilka charm and spell ;
Ance gaun to saw hemp-seed himsel',
Puir Jock M'Lean
Plump in a filthy peat-pot fell,
At Halloween.

pronouncing aloud the words used on such occasions ; and so anxious was she to *see something*, as she termed it, that—having seen nothing—she gathered up the hemp-seed to sow it a second time. In the course of the second sowing, according to her own account, a tall meagre figure presented itself to her imagination ! She shrieked aloud, and ran immediately into the house. After relating what she had seen, she went to bed, placing the Bible under her head ! She rose next morning, and went through the labours of the day in apparent good health ; but in the evening seemed somewhat timid. She went to bed without any symptoms of fear. Next morning she was called, but did not answer. A daughter of Mr Matthewson's then rose, went to her, and found that she was very sick, and that she had been so during part of the night. Tea was ordered for her, but before it could be prepared, she was seized with a stupor ; the pulse became sunk, the breathing difficult, and the hands swollen and blackish. A medical gentleman was instantly called ; he said it was an attack of apoplexy, which she could not survive more than ten minutes ; and in rather less than that time she expired. The surgeon was clearly of opinion that the impression made on her imagination by the fancied apparition was the cause of this fatal catastrophe.

Half-felled wi' fear, and drookit weel,
He frae the mire dought hardly spel;
But frae that time the silly chiel
Did never grien
To cast his cantrips wi' the Deil,
At Halloween.'

drenched
climb
long

* * * *

SECOND EPISTLE TO DAVIE,

A BROTHER POET.

AULD NEIBOR,

I'm three times doubly o'er your debtor,
For your auld-farrant, frien'ly letter ;
Though I maun say 't, I doubt ye flatter,
Yc speak sac fair,
For my puir, silly, rhymin' clatter
Some less maun sair.

sensible
serve

Hale be your heart, hale be your fiddle ;
Lang may your elbock jink and diddle,
To cheer you through the weary widdlc
O' war'ly cares,
Till bairns' bairns kindly cuddle
Your auld gray hairs.

caress

But, Davic lad, I'm red ye're glaikit ;
I'm tauld the Muse ye hae neglekit ;
And gif it's sae, ye sud be ticket,
Until ye fyke ;
Sic hauns as you sud ne'er be faiket,
Be hain't wha like.

told—inattentive
beaten
shrug
spared
saved

For me, I'm on Parnassus' brink,
Rivin' the words to gar them clink ;
Whyles daez't wi' love, whyles daez't wi' drink,
Wi' jads or masons ;
And whyles, but aye owre late, I think,
Braw sober lessons.

Of a' the thoughtless sons o' man,
Commen' me to the bardic clan ;
Except it be some idle plan
O' rhymin' clink,
The devil-hae't, that I sud ban,
They ever think.

Nae thought, nae view, nae scheme o' livin',
 Nae cares to gie us joy or grievin';
 But just the pouchie put the nicev in, fist
 And while ought's there,
 Then hiltie skiltie, we gae scrievin',
 And fash nae mair. trouble

Leeze me on rhyme! it's aye a treasure,
 My chief, amait my only pleasure,
 At hame, a-fiel', at wark, or leisure;
 The Muse, poor hizzic!
 Though rough and raploch be her measure, coarse
 She's scldom lazy.

Haud to the Musc, my dainty Davic:
 The warl' may play you monie a shavie;
 But for the Musc, she'll never leave ye,
 Though e'er sae puir,
 Na, even though limpin' wi' the spavie
 Frac door to door.

THE BRAES O' BALLOCHMYLE.¹

The Catrine woods were yellow seen,
 The flowers decayed on Catrine lea,
 Nae lav'rock sang on hillock green,
 But Nature sickened on the ee.
 Through faded groves Maria sang,
 Hersel' in beauty's bloom the while,
 And ayc the wild-wood echocs rang,
 Fareweel the Braes o' Ballochmylc!

Low in your wintry beds, ye flowers,
 Again yc 'll flourish fresh and fair;
 Ye birdies dumb, in with'ring bowers,
 Again ye 'll charm the vocal air.
 But here, alas! for me nae mair
 Shall birdie charm, or flow'ret smile;
 Fareweel the bonnie banks of Ayr,
 Fareweel, fareweel! sweet Ballochmylc!

'Several of the poems,' says Gilbert Burns, 'were produced for the purpose of bringing forward some favourite sentiment of the

¹ Composed on the amiable and excellent family of Whitefoord's leaving Ballochmyle, when Sir John's misfortunes obliged him to sell the estate.—B. Maria was Miss Whitefoord, afterwards Mrs Cranstoun.

author. He used to remark to me, that he could not well conceive a more mortifying picture of human life than a man seeking work. In casting about in his mind how this sentiment might be brought forward, the elegy *Man was made to Mourn* was composed.'

MAN WAS MADE TO MOURN.

A DIRGE.

When chill November's surly blast
Made fields and forests bare,
Onc evening, as I wandered forth
Along the banks of Ayr,
I spied a man whose aged step
Seemed weary, worn with care ;
His face was furrowed o'er with years,
And hoary was his hair.

' Young stranger, whither wanderest thou ?'
Began the reverend sage :

' Docs thirst of wealth thy step constrain,
Or youthful pleasures rage !
Or haply, prest with cares and woes,
Too soon thou hast began
To wander forth, with me, to mourn
The miseries of man.

' The sun that overhangs yon moors,
Outspreading far and wide,
Where hundreds labour to support
A haughty lordling's pride :
I 've seen yon weary winter-sun
Twice forty times return,
And every time has added proofs
That man was made to mourn.

' Oh, man ! while in thy early years,
How prodigal of time ;
Misspending all thy precious hours,
Thy glorious youthful prime !
Alternate follies take the sway ;
Licentious passions burn ;
Which tenfold force gives Nature's law,
That man was made to mourn.

' Look not alone on youthful prime,
Or manhood's active might ;
Man then is useful to his kind,
Supported is his right :

But see him on the edge of life,
 With cares and sorrows worn ;
 Then Age and Want—oh ill-matched pair !—
 Shew man was made to mourn.

‘ A few seem favourites of fate,
 In Pleasure’s lap carest ;
 Yet think not all the rich and great
 Are likewise truly blest.
 But, oh ! what crowds in every land,
 All wretched and forlorn !
 Through weary life this lesson learn—
 That man was made to mourn.

‘ Many and sharp the numerous ills
 Inwoven with our frame !
 More pointed still we make ourselves
 Regret, remorse, and shame ;
 And man, whose heaven-erected face
 The smiles of love adorn,
 Man’s inhumanity to man
 Makes countless thousands mourn !

‘ See yonder poor, o’erlaboured wight,
 So abject, mean, and vile,
 Who begs a brother of the earth
 To give him leave to toil ;
 And see his lordly fellow-worm
 The poor petition spurn,
 Unmindful, though a weeping wife
 And helpless offspring mourn.

‘ If I’m designed yon lordling’s slave—
 By Nature’s law designed—
 Why was an independent wish
 E’er planted in my mind ?
 If not, why am I subject to
 His cruelty or scorn ?
 Or why has man the will and power
 To make his fellow mourn ?

‘ Yet let not this too much, my son,
 Disturb thy youthful breast ;
 This partial view of human-kind
 Is surely not the last !
 The poor, oppressed, honest man,
 Had never, sure, been born,
 Had there not been some recompense
 To comfort those that mourn ?

' Oh, Death ! the poor man's dearest friend—
 The kindest and the best !
 Welcome the hour, my aged limbs
 Are laid with thee at rest !
 The great, the wealthy, fear thy blow,
 From pomp and pleasure torn !
 But, oh ! a blest relief to those
 That weary-laden mourn !'

The metrical structure, and some other features of this poem, may be traced to an old stall-ballad, entitled the *Life and Age of Man*, which Mr Cromeck recovered, and which opens thus :—

' Upon the sixteen hunder year
 Of God and fifty-three,
 Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear,
 As writings testifie ;
 On January the sixteenth day,
 As I did ly alone,
 With many a sigh and sob did say,
 Ah ! man is made to moan.'

Burns, in a letter to Mrs Dunlop, says : ' I had an old grand-uncle with whom my mother lived while in her girlish years ; the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died ; during which time, his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of the *Life and Age of Man* ? '

It would be the wildest injustice to Burns to suppose that even now, when so eager to satirise the more zealous professors of religion in his district, he was himself indifferent on that subject. We see an expression of devout adherence to true religion and undefiled in his letter to Mr M'Math in September. In October, he makes a final entry in his first Commonplace-book as follows :—

October 1785.

If ever any young man, in the vestibule of the world, chance to throw his eye over these pages, let him pay a warm attention to the following observations, as I assure him they are the fruit of a poor devil's dear-bought experience. I have literally, like that great poet and great gallant, and, by consequence, that great fool, Solomon, ' turned my eyes to behold madness and folly.' Nay, I have, with all the ardour of lively, fanciful, and whimsical imagination, accompanied with a warm, feeling, poetic heart, shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship.

In the first place, let my pupil, as he tenders his own peace, keep up a regular, warm intercourse with the Deity. * * *

The observations are thus broken off—very characteristically ; but it is something that the only one he had entered signifies that the poet was a devout man amidst all his errors. In his earlier

years, his father had shone before his family in that priestly character which presents Scottish humble life in one of its most beautiful aspects. Robert had begun, some time before the old man's death, to take a part in the family devotions, reading 'the chapter' and giving out the psalm. After the death of William Burness, it fell to the poet by right of ancient custom, he being the eldest born, to take on himself the whole function of the family-priest, and he conducted the cottage-worship every night when at home during the whole time of his residence at Mossgiel. More than this, his sister and another surviving member of the household speak in the warmest terms of the style of his prayers. The latter individual¹ states, that he has never since listened to anything equal to these addresses. These facts, it will be admitted, form an interesting prelude to the beautiful poem in which Burns has placed in everlasting remembrance this phase of the rustic life of Scotland. Gilbert Burns gives us an account of what immediately prompted his brother to compose this immortal work. 'He had frequently,' says Gilbert, 'remarked to me that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase "Let us worship God," used by a decent sober head of a family introducing family-worship. To this sentiment of the author the world is indebted for the *Cotter's Saturday Night*.' It needs only further to be remarked, that the poet found a model in one of the best poems of his predecessor Fergusson, entitled *The Farmer's Ingle*.

THE COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT.

INSCRIBED TO ROBERT AIKEN, ESQ.²

' Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys and destiny obscure ;
 Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
 The short and simple annals of the poor.' —GRAY.

My loved, my honoured, much-respected friend !
 No mereenary bard his homage pays ;
 With honest pride, I scorn each selfish end :
 My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and praise.
 To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
 The lowly train in life's sequestered scene ;
 The native feelings strong, the guileless ways ;
 What Aiken in a cottage would have been ;
 Ah ! though his worth unknown, far happier there, I ween !

¹ Mr William Ronald, now a farmer in the neighbourhood of Beith, in Ayrshire (1854).

² Probably the first verse and inscription to Mr Aiken were added afterwards.

November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh ;
 The short'ning winter-day is near a close ;
 The miry beasts retreatin' frac the pleugh :
 The black'ning trains o' crows to their repose :
 The toil-worn cotter frac his labour goes,
 This night his weekly moil is at an end,
 Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
 Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
 And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.¹

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
 Beneath the shelter of an aged tree ;
 Th' expectant wee things, toddlin', stacher through
 To meet their dad, wi' flichterin' noise and glee.
 His wee bit ingle, blinking bonnily,
 His clean hearthstane, his thrifte wifie's smile,
 The lisping infant Prattling on his knee,
 Does a' his weary kiaugh and care beguile,
 And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

Belyve, the elder bairns come drapping in,
 At service out, amang the farmers roun' :
 Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentic rin
 A cannie errand to a neibor town :
 Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman grown,
 In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
 Comes hame, perhaps to shew a braw new gown,
 Or deposit her sair-won penny-fee,
 To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

5

With joy unfeigned, brothers and sisters meet,
 And each for other's weelfare kindly spiers :
 The social hours, swift-winged, unnoticed fleet ;
 Each tells the uncous that he sees or hears ;
 The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years ;
 Anticipation forward points the view.
 The mother, wi' her needle and her shears,
 Gars auld claes look amait as weel's the new—
 The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

¹ The opening verse of *The Farmer's Ingé* bears a considerable resemblance to this :—

' Whan gloamin' gray out-owre the welkin keeks,
 Whan Bawtie ea's the owsen to the byre,
 Whan Thrasher John, sair dung, his barn-door steeks,
 Whan lusty lasses at the digitting tire :
 What bangs fu' leal the c'enning's coming cauld,
 And gars snaw-tappit winter freeze in vain ;
 Gars dowie mortals look baith blithe and bauld,
 Nor fleyed wi' a' the puirtith o' the plain ;
 Begin, my Muse, and chant in hamely strain.'

jaded—shuts
winnowing
beats—truly
makes

frightened

Their master's and their mistress's command,

The younkers a' are warnèd to obey;

And mind their labours wi' an eydent hand,

diligent
dally

And ne'er, though out o' sight, to jauk or play :

'And oh! be sure to fear the Lord alway!

And mind your duty, duly, morn and night!

Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,

Implore His counsel and assisting might:

They never sought in vain that sought the Lord aright!

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door;

Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,

Tells how a neibor lad cam o'er the moor,

To do some errands, and convoy her hame.

The wily mother sees the conscious flame

Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek,

With heart-struck anxious care, inquires his name,

While Jenny haffins is afraid to speak;

Weel pleased the mother hears it's nac wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;

A strappin' youth; he takts the mother's eye;

Blithe Jenny sees the visit's no ill-ta'en;

The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.

The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,

But blate and lathefu', scarce can weel believe; bashful—hesitating

The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy

What makes the youth sae bashfu' and sae grave:

Weel pleased to think her bairn's respected like the lave. other people

Oh happy love!—where love like this is found!

Oh heartfelt raptures!—bliss beyond compare!

I've pacèd much this weary, mortal round,

And sage experience bids me this declare:

'If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,

One cordial in this melancholy vale,

'Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair

In other's arms breathe out the tender tale,

Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale.'

Is there, in human form, that bears a heart,

A wretch! a villain! lost to love and truth!

That can, with studied, sly, ensnaring art,

Betray sweet Jenny's unsuspecting youth?

Curse on his perjur'd arts! dissembling smooth!

Are honour, virtue, conscience, all exiled?

Is there no pity, no relenting ruth,

Points to the parents fondling o'er their child?

Then paints the ruined maid, and their distraction wild?

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief of Scotia's food ; porridge
The soupe their only hawkie does afford, cow
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood : porch
The dame brings forth, in complimentary mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell, cheese—biting
And aft he's prest, and aft he ea's it guid ;
The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell. twelvemonth

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide ;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
 The big ha' Bible, ance his father's pride ;
 His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare ; gray temples
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
 He wales a portion with judicious care ; selects
And 'Let us worship God !' he says, with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise ;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim :
Perhaps *Dundee's* wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive *Martyrs*, worthy of the name,
Or noble *Elgin* beets the heavenward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays :
Compared with these, Italian trills are tame ;
The tickled ear no heartfelt raptures raise ;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page—
How Abram was the friend of God on high;
Or, Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire;
Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry;
Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme—
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed :
How HE, who bore in heaven the second name,
Had not on earth wheroun to lay his head :
How his first followers and servants spcd,
The precepts sage they wrote to many a land :
How he, who lone in Patmos banished,
Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand ;
And heard great Bab'lou's doom pronounced by Heaven's
command.

Then kneeling down to HEAVEN'S ETERNAL KING,
 The saint, the father, and the husband prays :
 Hope 'springs exulting on triumphant wing,'¹
 That thus they all shall meet in future days :
 There ever bask in uncreated rays,
 No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
 Together hymning their Creator's praise,
 In such society, yet still more dear ;
 While circling Time moves round in an eternal sphere.

Compared with this, how poor Religion's pride,
 In all the pomp of method, and of art,
 When men display to congregations wide,
 Devotion's every grace, except the heart !
 The Power, incensed, the pageant will desert,
 The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ;
 But, haply, in some cottage far apart,
 May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul ;
 And in His book of life the inmates poor enrol.

Then homeward all take off their several way ;
 The youngling cottagers retire to rest :
 The parent-pair their secret homage pay,
 And proffer up to Heaven the warm request,
 That HE, who stills the raven's clamorous nest,
 And decks the lily fair in flowery pride,
 Would, in the way His wisdom sees the best,
 For them and for their little ones provide ;
 But, chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside.

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
 That makes her loved at home, revered abroad :
 Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
 'An honest man's the noblest work of God ;'
 And certes, in fair Virtue's heavenly road,
 The cottage leaves the palace far behind ;
 What is a lordling's pomp ?—a cumbrous load,
 Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
 Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refined !

Oh Scotia ! my dear, my native soil !
 For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent !
 Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
 Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content !
 And oh ! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
 From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !
 Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
 A virtuous populace may rise the while,
 And stand a wall of fire around their much-loved isle.

¹ Pope's *Windsor Forest*.—B.

Oh Thou ! who poured the patriotic tide,
 That streamed through Wallace's undaunted heart,
 Who dared to nobly stem tyrannic pride,
 Or nobly die, the second glorious part,
 (The patriot's God, peculiarly thou art,
 His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward !)
 Oh never, never, Scotia's realm desert ;
 But still the patriot, and the patriot bard,
 In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard !

The *Address to the Deil* appears to have been produced in early winter, probably before the month of November had expired. Gilbert recollects his brother repeating the poem to him as they were going together with their carts to bring coal for the family fire. ‘The curious idea of such an address was,’ he says, ‘suggested to him by running over in his mind the many ludicrous accounts and representations we have from various quarters of this august personage.’ The poem has been a theme of unmixed praise with all the critics of Burns. As a serio-comic embodiment of popular superstitions, it is unrivalled, and the relenting tenderness of the final stanza is a stroke which could have come from scarcely any other poet.

A D D R E S S T O T H E D E I L.

Oh Prince ! oh chief of many throned powers,
 That led th' embattled seraphim to war.—MILTON.

Oh thou ! whatever title suit thee,
 Auld Hornie, Satan, Nick, or Clootie,¹
 Wha in your cavern grim and sootie,
 Closed under hatches,
 Spairges about the brunstane cootic,²
 To seaud poor wretches !

Hear me, auld Hangie, for a wee,
 And let poor d—d bodies be ;
 I'm sure sma' pleasure it can gie,
 E'en to a deil,
 To skelp and seaud poor dogs like me,
 And hear us squeel !

¹ A Scotch appellative of Satan, from his cloven feet or *cloots*.

² Burns here imagines a foot-pail, called in Scotland a *cootic*, as employed by Satan in distributing brimstone over the unfortunates under his care.

Great is thy power, and great thy fame ;
 Far kenned and noted is thy name ;
 And though yon lowin' heugh's thy hame,
 Thou travels far ;
 And, faith ! thou's neither lag nor lame,
 Nor blate nor scaur.

hollow

apt to be scared

Whyles, ranging like a roaring lion,
 For prey a' holes and corners tryin' ;
 Whyles on the strong-winged tempest flyin',
 Tirlin' the kirks ;
 Whyles in the human bosom pryin',
 Unseen thou lurks.

Uncovering

I've heard my reverend grannie say,
 In lanely glens ye like to stray ;
 Or where auld ruined castles, gray,
 Nod to the moon,
 Ye fright the nightly wanderer's way
 Wi' eldritch croon.

When twilight did my grannie summon,
 To say her prayers, douce honest woman !
 Aft yont the dike she's heard you bummin',
 Wi' cerie drone ;
 Or, rustlin', through the boortrees comin',
 Wi' heavy groan.

elder-trees

Ae dreary, windy, winter-night,
 The stars shot down wi' sklentin' light,
 Wi' you, mysel', I gat a fright
 Ayont the lough ;
 Ye, like a rash-bush, stood in sight,
 Wi' waving sough.

The cudgel in my nieve did shake,
 Each bristled hair stood like a stake,
 When wi' an eldritch, stoor quaick—quaick—frightful
 Amang the springs,
 Awa' ye squattered, like a drake,
 On whistling wings.

fist

Let warlocks grim, and withered hags,
 Tell how wi' you, on ragweed nags,
 They skim the muirs and dizzy crags,
 Wi' wicked speed ;
 And in kirk-yards renew their leagues
 Owre howkit dead.

excavated

Thence countra wives, wi' toil and pain,
 May plunge and plunge the kirn in vain ;
 For, oh ! the yellow treasure 's ta'en
 By witching skill ;
 And dawtit, twal-pint Hawkie's gaen petted
 As yell's the bill. milkless

Thenee mystic knots mak great abuse,
 On young guidmen, fond, keen, and crouse,
 When the best wark-lume i' the house,
 By cantrip wit,
 Is instant made no worth a louse,
 Just at the bit.

When thowes dissolve the snawy hoord,
 And float the jinglin' icy boord,
 Then water-kelpies haunt the foord,
 By your direetion ;
 And 'nighted travellers are allured
 To their destruction.

And aft your moss-traversing spunkies
 Decoy the wight that late and drunk is :
 The bleezin', curst, mischievous monkeys
 Delude his eyes,
 Till in some miry slough he sunk is,
 Ne'er mair to rise.

When mason's mystic word and grip,
 In storms and tempests raise you up,
 Some cock or cat your rage maun stop,
 Or, strange to tell !
 The youngest brother ye wad whip
 Aff straught to h— !

Lang syne, in Eden's bonny yard,
 When youthfu' lovers first were paired,
 And all the soul of love they shared,
 The raptured hour,
 Sweet on the fragrant flowery swaird,
 In shady bower.¹

¹ This verse ran originally as follows :—

Lang syne, in Eden's happy scene,
 When strappin' Adam's days were green,
 And Eve was like my bonnie Jean,
 My dearest part,
 A dancin', sweet, young handsome quean,
 O' guileless heart.

D'ye mind that day, when in a bizz, bustle
Wi' reekit duds, and reestit gizz, smoked clothes—withered hair
Ye did present your smootie phiz dirty
 'Mang better folk,
And sklented on the man of Uzz glanced
 Your spitefu' joke?

And how ye gat him i' your thrall,
And brak him out o' house and hall,
While scabs and blotches did him gall,
 Wi' bitter claw,
And lows'd his ill-tongued, wicked scawl, scolding wife
 Was warst ava?

But a' your doings to rehearse,
Your wily snares and fechtin' fierce,
Sin' that day Michael did you pierce,
Down to this time,
Wad ding a Lallan tongue, or Erse,
In prose or rhyme.

And now, auld Cloots, I ken ye're thinkin',
A certain bardie's rantin', drinkin',
Some luckless hour will send him linkin'
 To your black pit;
But, faith! he'll turn a corner jinkin',
 And cheat you yet.

But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben !
O wad ye tak a thought and men' !
Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
 Still hae a stake—
I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
 Even for your sake !

Something should have been said before regarding the scenes and persons amongst which Burns was living at this crisis. In 1833, after a visit to Mauchline for the purpose of making

¹ 'Sneek-drawing dog' expresses a stealthy, insidious person, who opens doors by drawing the *sneek* or latch unheard.

inquiries regarding the Mossgiel poet, the editor wrote as follows :—

‘ Mauchline is a parish town of above a thousand inhabitants, in ancient times the seat of a priory belonging to Melrose, but now differing in no respect from a common agricultural village. It is situated upon a slope ascending from the margin of the Ayr, from which it is about two miles distant. One might at first suppose that a rustic population like that of Mauchline would form but a poor field for the descriptive and satirical genius of Burns. It is wonderful, however, how variously original many of the inhabitants of the most ordinary Scottish village will contrive to be. Human nature may be studied everywhere; and perhaps it nowhere assumes so many strikingly distinct forms as in a small cluster of men, such as is to be found in a town of a thousand inhabitants. In such a place every individual luxuriates in his own particular direction, till the whole become as well individualised as the objects of inanimate nature; while in a city the individual is lost in the mass, and no one is greatly different from another. In a small town, the character of every man is well known, so that everything he says and does is felt as characteristic, and enjoyed accordingly. One is a wag, another is a miser, a third exaggerates all he has to relate, a fourth (but this is apt to be less of a distinction) is overinclined to strong waters. Every one is more or less a humorist, and, as such, affords a perpetual fund of amusement to his compeers. If Shakespeare could draw lively delineations of human character from such persons as the originals of Silence and Shallow, it may well be conceived that a genius like Burns must have seen as good subjects in many of the villagers of Mauchline. To give an idea of the taste for wit and humour which might exist in such a scene as this, we may quote what was said by a shopkeeper named D——, when on his death-bed, in reference to a person who had been to him and all the other inhabitants as the very sun and soul of fun for many years, and was recently deceased. Even in this melancholy condition, D—— said he accounted it no small consolation to reflect that he had *lived in the same days with John Weir*. The mind of the honest trader might no doubt have been filled with more fitting reflections at such a time; but it is impossible to doubt that it was from such escapes of natural character that the very happiest touches of both Shakespeare and Burns were derived.¹

¹ John Weir was the father of Sergeant Weir, whose name has obtained a place in history, in consequence of specially gallant achievements at Waterloo.

'Let us for a moment review the village as it was in external and moral respects in the days of Burns. First, in a central situation, stood its old barn-like church, surrounded by a burial-ground, full, as usual, of flat and upright monuments—the scene of those prelections which the poet has described in his *Holy Fair*. Close by are the remains of the ancient priory, consisting of little besides an old dismantled tower, beside which was planted the neat mansion of Gavin Hamilton the writer. He is a pleasant-natured man, with a young family rising around him. In his little business-room will be found one or two young scapegrace clerks, great cronies of Burns; one of them his correspondent, John Richmond. If you take your stand in the kirk-yard, you see into Gavin's garden in one direction; in another, you see the back of Nanse Tinnock's change-house—the resort of yill-caup commentators during intervals of sermon, and the place in which Burns offered to drink the premier's health nine times a week, provided he would save aqua-vitæ from fiscal oppression. Nanse is a true ale-wife—quiet, civil, discreet, and no tale-teller. She would not blab even about Burns, but insisted to the end of her life that he had indulged very little in her house. In another direction, opposite the principal entrance to the church-yard, runs off a street called the Cowgate, in which Jeanie Armour lives. Here we see facing us a little white-faced inn of two stories—the Whitefoord Arms—kept by one John Dove or Dow; perhaps a greater haunt of the Mossiel bard than Nansie's. Him Burns consigns to fame through the medium of a burlesque epitaph, no doubt presenting a tolerably just view of John's character:—

ON JOHN DOVE,

INNKEEPER, MAUCHLINE.

Here lies Johnny Pigeon;
 What was his religion?
 Wha e'er desires to ken,
 To some other warl'
 Maun follow the carl,
 For here Johnny Pigeon had nane!

Strong ale was ablution—
 Small beer persecution,
 A dram was *memento mori*;
 But a full-flowing bowl
 Was the joy of his soul,
 And port was celestial glory.

'In a good-looking shop in one of the streets of Mauchline, would have been found James Smith, a clever, little, dark-complexioned fellow, of bright social powers, and much sense and acuteness. To him Burns has cleaved like a brother, and many an evening do they spend together. Then, amongst the "characters," we have Poosie Nansie—a beldame who keeps a lodging-house for vagrants. She is attended by a strange girl in the relation of daughter—yelept Racer Jess—who has run races for wagers, and is sometimes employed, on account of her speed of foot, in carrying messages throughout the country. Burns, Smith, and Richmond, are not above enjoying the odd scenes presented in Poosie Nansie's hotel, where wretches passing before the world for maimed and blind, recover the use of limbs and senses, and compensate in a hearty supper for all the privations and contumelies which they suffer in their exoteric character by day. Wild intemperance and frantic merriment, mingled with frightful quarrels and broils, distinguish this scene of low life—which, nevertheless, is a scene not below the regard of one who finds a human heart beating even in the worst of his kind. Holy Willie, too, we may be sure, supplies in his canting language and sordid overreaching habits abundant matter of remark to Burns and his friends. There is a zealot of a different stamp—James Humphry by name, a working-man, but the very type of a theological Scottish villager—a critic of sermons, a meddler with ministers, a pertinacious long-tongued disputant about texts—in short, the "noisy polemic" whom Burns has immortalised in an epitaph. He, we cannot doubt, must have afforded food for many a merry remark. The "unco guid" generally would be of course frequently canvassed in all the bearings of their characters—great joy would be felt when their decent robes gave way in aught, shewing the unclean heart beneath. The more notedly self-indulgent, who only kept up a tolerable face of decency before society, if more mildly treated, would at least supply abundant themes of grotesque narration. Such the place, and such the persons, now forming the drama of life in which the poet moved, himself a phenomenon of no common kind, a subject of terror and aversion to many, on account of his imputed "wildness" and latitudinarianism, while with others he was as much an object of affection and admiration because of his generous heart, his immense powers of wit, and the wonderful productions of his Muse.'

This imperfect sketch may serve as generally introductory to

his poems, *The Jolly Beggars*, *The Epistle to James Smith*, *The Holy Fair*, and some others.

THE JOLLY BEGGARS:

A CANTATA.

RECITATIVO.

When lyart leaves bestrew the yird,
Or wavering like the baukie-bird,
 Bedim cauld Boreas' blast;
When hailstanes drive wi bitter skyte
And infant frosts begin to bite,
 In hoary cranreuch drest;
Ae night at e'en a merry core
 O' randie, gangrel bodies,
In Poosie Nansie's held the splore,
 To drink their orra duddies:
 Wi' quaffing and laughing,
 They ranted and they sang;
 Wi' jumping and thumping,
 The vera girdle¹ rang.

First, niest the fire, in auld red rags,
Ane sat, weel braced wi' mealy bags,
 And knapsack a' in order;
His doxy lay within his arm,
 Wi' usquebae and blankets warm—
 She blinket on her sodger:
And aye he gies the tozie drab
 The tither skelpin' kiss,
While she held up her greedy gab
 Just like an aumos dish.²
 Ilk smack still, did crack still,
 Just like a cadger's³ whip,
Then staggering and swaggering,
 He roared this ditty up.

gray—earth
bat
impulse
hoar-frost
vagrant
merry-meeting
odd

¹ An iron plate, used in Scottish cottages for baking cakes over the fire.

² The Scottish beggars used to carry a large wooden dish for the reception of any alms which took the shape of food. The same utensil seems to have once been (if it is not so still) a part of the accoutrements of a continental beggar. When the revolted Netherlanders, in the sixteenth century, assumed the character of *Les Gueux*, or the Beggars, a beggar's *wooden cup* was one of their insignia.

³ A *cadger* is a man who travels the country with a horse or ass, carrying two panniers loaded with various merchandise for the country-people.—CROMEK.

A I R.

TUNE—*Soldiers' Joy.*

I am a son of Mars, who have been in many wars,
 And shew my cuts and scars wherever I come ;
 This here was for a wench, and that other in a trench,
 When welcoming the French at the sound of the drum.

Lal de daudle, &c.

My 'prenticeship I past where my leader breathed his last,
 When the bloody die was cast on the heights of Abram ;¹
 I served out my trade when the gallant game was played,
 And the Morro² low was laid at the sound of the drum.

Lal de daudle, &c.

I lastly was with Curtis, among the floating-batteries,³
 And there I left for witness an arm and a limb ;
 Yet let my country need me, with Elliot⁴ to head me,
 I'd clatter on my stumps at the sound of a drum.

Lal de daudle, &c.

And now though I must beg with a wooden arm and leg,
 And many a tattered rag hanging over my bum,
 I'm as happy with my wallet, my bottle and my callet,
 As when I used in scarlet to follow a drum.

Lal de daudle, &c.

What though with hoary locks I must stand the winter shocks,
 Bencath the woods and rocks oftentimes for a home,
 When the t'other bag I sell, and the t'other bottle tell,
 I could meet a troop of h— at the sound of a drum.

Lal de daudle, &c.

RECITATIVO.

He ended; and the kebars sheuk,	rafters
Aboon the chorus roar ;	
While frightened rattons backward leuk,	
And seek the benmost bore ;	innermost

¹ The battle-ground in front of Quebec, where Wolfe fell victoriously, September 1759.

² El Morro, the castle which defends the entrance to the harbour of Santiago or St Jago, a small island near the southern shore of Cuba. It is situated on an eminence, the abutments being cut out of the limestone rock.—*Logan's Notes of a Tour*, &c. Edinburgh, 1838. In 1762, this castle was stormed and taken by the British, after which the Havana was surrendered, with spoil to the value of three millions.

³ ‘The destruction of the Spanish floating-batteries during the famous siege of Gibraltar in 1782—on which occasion the gallant Captain Curtis rendered the most signal service—is the heroic exploit here referred to.’—MOTHERWELL.

⁴ George Augustus Elliot, created Lord Heathfield for his admirable defence of Gibraltar during a siege of three years. Born 1717, died 1790.

A fairy fiddler frae the neuk,
He skirled out ‘Encore !’
But up arose the martial chuck,
And laid the loud uproar.

A I R.

TUNE—*Soldier Laddie.*

I once was a maid, though I cannot tell when,
And still my delight is in proper young men ;
Some one of a troop of dragoons was my daddie,
No wonder I’m fond of a sodger laddie.

Sing, Lal de lal, &c.

The first of my loves was a swaggering blade,
To rattle the thundering drum was his trade ;
His leg was so tight, and his cheek was so ruddy,
Transported I was with my sodger laddie.

Sing, Lal de lal, &c.

But the godly old chaplain left him in the lurch,
The sword I forsook for the sake of the church ;
He ventured the soul, and I risked the body—
’Twas then I proved false to my sodger laddie.

Sing, Lal de lal, &c.

Full soon I grew sick of my sanctified sot,
The regiment at large for a husband I got ;
From the gilded spontoon to the fife I was ready,
I asked no more but a sodger laddie.

Sing, Lal de lal, &c.

But the peace it reduced me to beg in despair,
Till I met my old boy at a Cunningham fair ;
His rags regimental they fluttered so gaudy,
My heart it rejoiced at a sodger laddie.

Sing, Lal de lal, &c.

And now I have lived—I know not how long,
And still I can join in a cup and a song ;
But whilst with both hands I can hold the glass steady,
Here’s to thee, my hero, my sodger laddie.

Sing, Lal de lal, &c.

RECITATIVO.

Poor Merry Andrew in the neuk,
Sat guzzling wi’ a tinkler hizzie ; wench
They mind’t na wha the chorus teuk,
Between themselves they were sae busy :
At length wi’ drink and courting dizzy,
He stoitered up and made a face ; staggered
Then turned, and laid a smack on Grizzie,
Synce tuned his pipes wi’ grave grimace.

AIR.

TUNE—*Auld Sir Symon.*

Sir Wisdom's a fool when he's fou,^{drunk}
 Sir Knave is a fool in a session;¹
 He's there but a 'prentice I trow,
 But I am a fool by profession.

My grannie she bought me a beuk,
 And I held awa' to the school;
 I fear I my talent misteuk,
 But what will ye hae of a fool?

For drink I would venture my neck,
 A hizzie's the half o' my craft,
 But what could ye other expect,
 Of aunc that's avowedly daft?

I aunc was tied up like a stirk,
 For civilly swearing and quaffin';
 I aunc was abused in the kirk,
 For touzling a lass i' my daffin.

Poor Andrew that tumbles for sport,
 Let naebody name wi' a jeer;
 There's even, I'm tauld, i' the court
 A tumbler ca'd the Premier.

Observed ye, yon reverend lad,
 Maks faces to tickle the mob;
 He rails at our mountebank squad—
 It's rivalship just i' the job.

And now my conclusion I'll tell,
 For faith I'm confoundedly dry;
 The chiel that's a fool for himsel',
 Guid L—! he's far dafter than I.

RECITATIVO.

Then niest outspak a rauele carlin,
 Wha kent fu' weel to cleek the sterling,
 For monie a pursie she had hooked,
 And had in monie a well been ducked.
 Her dove had been a Highland laddie,
 But weary fa' the waefu' woodie!
 Wi' sighs and sobs she thus began
 To wail her braw John Highlandman.

stout beldam
catch

halter

¹ Meaning, apparently, when under trial for some misdeed.

AIR

TUNE—*O an' ye were dead, Guidman,*

A Highland lad my love was born,
The Lawland laws he held in scorn,
But he still was faithfu' to his clan,
My gallant braw John Highlandman.

CHORUS.

Sing, hey my braw John Highlandman !
Sing, ho my braw John Highlandman !
There's not a lad in a' the lan'
Was match for my John Highlandman.

We rangèd a' from Tweed to Spey,
And lived like lords and ladies gay ;
For a Lawland face he fearèd none,
My gallant braw John Highlandman.

RESULTS

A pigmy scraper, wi' his fiddle,
Wha used at trysts and fairs to driddle,
Her strappin' limb and gauzy middle
 (He reached na higher)
Had holed his heartie like a riddle,
 And blawn't on fire.

Wi' hand on haunch, and upward c'e,
He crooned his gamut, one, two, three,
Then in an arioso key,

The wee Apollo
Set off wi' allegretto glee
His giga solo.

murmured

A I R.

TUNE—*Whistle owre the lave o't.*

Let me ryke up to dight that tear,
And go wi' me and be my dear,
And then your every care and fear
May whistle owre the lave o't.

reach—wipe

C H O R U S.

I am a fiddler to my trade,
And a' the tunes that e'er I played,
The sweetest still to wife or maid,
Was whistle owre the lave o't.

At kirns and weddings we 'se be there,
And oh! sae nicely's we will fare;
We'll bouse about till Daddy Care
Sings whistle owre the lave o't.

I am, &c.

Sae merrily the banes we'll pyke,
And sun oursel's about the dike,
And at our leisure, when ye like,
We'll whistle owre the lave o't.

pick

I am, &c.

But bless me wi' your heaven o' charms,
And while I kittle hair on thairms,¹
Hunger, cauld, and a' sie harms,
May whistle owre the lave o't.

I am, &c.

R E C I T A T I V O.

Her charms had struck a sturdy caird,
As weel as poor gut-seraper;
He takis the fiddler by the beard,
And draws a rusty rapier—

gipsy

He swore by a' was swearing worth,
To speet him like a pliver,
Unless he wad from that time forth
Relinquish her for ever.

¹ While I apply hair to catgut.

Wi' ghastly e'e, poor Tweedle-dee
 Upon his hunkers bended,
 And prayed for grace wi' rucfu' face,
 And sae the quarrel ended.

But though his little heart did grieve
 When round the tinkler prest her,
 He feigned to snirtle in his sleeve,
 When thus the caird addressed her :

A I R.

TUNE—*Clout the Caudron.*

My bonny lass, I work in brass,
 A tinkler is my station :
 I've travelled round all Christian ground
 In this my occupation :
 I've ta'en the gold, I've been enrolled
 In many a noble squadron :
 But vain they searched, when off I marched
 To go and clout the caudron.

I've ta'en the gold, &c. patch

Despise that shrimp, that withered imp,
 Wi' a' his noise and cap'rin',
 And tak a share wi' those that bear
 The budget and the apron.
 And by that stoup, my faith and houp,
 And by that dear Kilbagie,¹
 If e'er you want, or meet wi' scant,
 May I ne'er weet my craigie.

And by that stoup, &c. throat

RECITATIVO.

The caird prevailed—the unblushing fair
 In his embraces sunk,
 Partly wi' love o'ercome sae sair,
 And partly she was drunk.
 Sir Violino, with an air
 That shewed a man of spunk,
 Wished unison between the pair,
 And made the bottle clunk
 To their health that night.

¹ A sort of whisky in high reputation, produced at a distillery of that name in Clackmannanshire.

But hurchin Cupid shot a shaft,
 That played a dame a shavie,
 The fiddler raked her fore and aft,
 Ahint the chicken cavie.
 Her lord, a wight o' Homer's craft,
 Though limping wi' the spavic,
 He hirpled up, and lap like daft,
 And shored them Dainty Davie
 O' boot that night.

trick

threatened

He was a care-defying blade
 As ever Bacchus listed,
 Though Fortune sair upon him laid,
 His heart she ever missed it.
 He had nae wish but—to be glad,
 Nor want but—when he thirsted ;
 He hated nought but—to be sad,
 And thus the Muse suggested
 His sang that night.

A I R.

TUNE—*For a' that, and a' that.*

I am a bard of no regard
 Wi' gentle folks, and a' that ;
 But Homer-like, the glowrin' byke,
 Frac town to town I draw that.

staring multitude

C H O R U S.

For a' that, and a' that,
 And twice as muckle 's a' that,
 I've lost but ane, I've twa behin',
 I've wife eneugh for a' that.

I never drank the Muses' stank,
 Castalia's burn, and a' that ;
 But there it streams, and richly reams,
 My Helicon I ca' that,
 For a' that, &c.

pool

Great love I bear to a' the fair,
 Their humble slave, and a' that ;
 But lordly will, I hold it still
 A mortal sin to throw that.
 For a' that, &c.

In raptures sweet, this hour we meet,
 Wi' mutual love, and a' that ;
 But for how lang the flic may stang,
 Let inclination law that.
 For a' that, &c.

Their tricks and craft have put me daft,
They've ta'en me in, and a' that ;
But clear your decks, and here's the sex ;
I like the jads for a' that.

C H O R U S.

For a' that, and a' that,
And twice as muckle's a' that;
My dearest bluid, to do them guid,
They're welcome till 't for a' that.

RECITATIVO.

AIR.

TUNE—*Jolly Mortals, fill your Glasses.*

See ! the smoking bowl before us,
Mark our jovial ragged ring !
Round and round take up the chorus,
And in raptures let us sing.

C H O R U S.

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

What is title? what is treasure?
What is reputation's care?
If we lead a life of pleasure,
'Tis no matter how or where!
A fig, &c.

With the ready trick and fable,
 Round we wander all the day ;
 And at night, in barn or stable,
 Hug our doxies on the hay.
 A fig, &c.

Does the train-attended carriage
 Through the country lighter rove ?
 Does the sober bed of marriage
 Witness brighter scenes of love ?
 A fig, &c.

Life is all a variorum,
 We regard not how it goes ;
 Let them cant about decorum
 Who have characters to lose.
 A fig, &c.

Here's to budgets, bags, and wallets !
 Here's to all the wandering train !
 Here's our ragged brats and calleets !
 One and all cry out—Amen !

A fig for those by law protected !
 Liberty's a glorious feast !
 Courts for cowards were erected,
 Churches built to please the priest.¹

The poem is understood to have been founded on the poet's observation of an actual scene which one night met his eye, when, in company with his friends John Richmond and James Smith, he dropped accidentally at a late hour into the humble hostelry of Mrs Gibson, more familiarly named Poosie Nansie, already referred to. After witnessing much jollity amongst a company who by day appeared abroad as miserable beggars, the three young men came away, Burns professing to have been greatly amused with the scene, but particularly with the gleesome behaviour of an old maimed soldier. In the course of a few days, he recited a part of the poem to Richmond, who used to say,

¹ 'In one or two passages of the *Jolly Beggars*, the Muse has slightly trespassed on decorum, where, in the language of Scottish song—

'High kilted was she,
 As she gaed owre the lea.'

Something, however, is to be allowed to the nature of the subject, and something to the education of the poet; and if from veneration to the names of Swift and Dryden, we tolerate the grossness of the one and the indelicacy of the other, the respect due to that of Burns may surely claim indulgence for a few light strokes of broad humour.'—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

that, to the best of his recollection, it contained, in its original complete form, songs by a sweep and a sailor, which did not afterwards appear.¹

The groundwork which we thus find that Burns had for the *Jolly Beggars*, only proves the extraordinary extent of his creative powers, deepening the regret which all must feel that he never applied himself heartily to fiction, either in poetry or prose. The poem, it may be remarked, was not a favourite with his mother and brother, and it does not appear that the poet ever contemplated giving it to the world. On the contrary, he laid it aside, and in a few years had ceased to remember its existence. On being reminded of it by Mr George Thomson in 1793, he says, in a passage hitherto unedited of the letter dated 13th September of that year: ‘I have forgot the cantata you allude to, as I kept no copy, and indeed did not know of its existence; however, I remember that none of the songs pleased myself, except the last, something about—

“Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.”

The cantata was first published in a piratical edition of the author’s poems by Stewart, Glasgow, 1801.

¹ There was, after all, a kind of pattern or model for this singular composition, in a song entitled *The Merry Beggars*, which appears in *The Charmer*, 2 vols., 1751:—

MERRY BEGGARS.

1st Beggar. I once was a poet at London,
I keep my heart still full of glee;
There’s no man can say that I’m undone,
For begging’s no new trade to me.

2d Beg. I once was an attorney-at-law,
And after a knight of the post;
Give me a nice wench and clean straw,
And I value not who rules the roast.

3d Beg. Make room for a soldier in buff,
Who valiantly strutted about,
Till he fancied the peace breaking off,
And then he most wisely sold out.

4th Beg. Here comes a courtier polite, sir,
Who flattered my lord to his face;
Now railing is all his delight, sir,
Because he missed getting a place.

5th Beg. I still am a merry gut-scraper,
My heart never yet felt a qualm;
Though poor, I can frolic and vapour,
And sing any tune but a psalm.

6th Beg. I was a fanatical preacher,
I turned up my eyes when I prayed;
But my hearers half-starved their teacher,
For they believed not a word that I said.

1st Beg. Whoe’er would be merry and free,
Let him list and from us he may learn;
In palaces who shall you see
Half so happy as we in a barn?

CHORUS OF ALL.

Whoe’er would be merry, &c.

TO JAMES SMITH.

' Friendship ! mysterious cement of the soul !
Sweet'ner of life, and solder of society !
I owe thee much ! '—BLAIR.

Dear Smith, the slee'est, paukie thief,
That e'er attempted stealth or rief,
Ye surely hae some warlock-breef
 Owre human hearts ;
For ne'er a bosom yet was prief
 Against your arts.

robbery
spell
proof

For me, I swear by sun and moon,
And every star that blinks aboon,
Ye've cost me twenty pair o' shoon
 Just gaun to see you ;
And every ither pair that's done,
 Mair ta'en I'm wi' you.

twinkles

That auld capricious carlin, Nature,
To mak amends for scrimpet stature,
She's turned you aff, a human creature
 On her first plan ;
And in her freaks, on every feature
 She's wrote, the Man.

stinted

Just now I've ta'en the fit o' rhyme,
My barmie noddle's working prime,
My fancy yerkit up sublime
 Wi' hasty summon :
Hae ye a leisure moment's time,
 To hear what's comin' ?

yeasty
fermented

Some rhyme a neighbour's name to lash ;
Some rhyme (vain thought !) for needfu' cash ;
Some rhyme to court the country clash,
 And raise a din ;
For me, an aim I never fash—
 I rhyme for fun.

gossip

The star that rules my luckless lot,
Has fated me the russet coat,
And d—d my fortune to the groat ;
 But in requit,
Has blest me wi' a random shot
 O' country wit.

This while my notion's ta'en a sklent,
 To try my fate in guid black prent;
 But still the mair I'm that way bent,
 Something cries 'Hoolie !
 I red you, honest man, tak tent !
 Ye'll shaw your folly.

Gently
warn

'There's ither poets much your betters,
 Far seen in Greek, deep men o' letters,
 Hae thought they had insured their debtors
 A' future ages;
 Now moths deform in shapeless tatters,
 Their unknown pages.'

Then farewell hopes o' laurel-boughs,
 To garland my poetic brows !
 Henceforth I'll rove where busy ploughs
 Are whistling thrang,
 And teach the lanely heights and howes
 My rustic sang.

I'll wander on, with tentless heed
 How never-halting moments speed,
 Till fate shall snap the brittle thread ;
 Then, all unknown,
 I'll lay me with the inglorious dead,
 Forgot and gone !

But why o' death begin a tale ?
 Just now we're living sound and hale,
 Then top and maintop crowd the sail,
 Heave Care o'er side !
 And large before Enjoyment's gale,
 Let's tak the tide.

This life, sae far's I understand,
 Is a' enchanted fairy-land,
 Where Pleasure is the magie wand,
 That, wielded right,
 Maks hours like minutes, hand in hand,
 Dance by fu' light.

The magic wand then let us wield ;
 For, ance that five-and-forty's speel'd,
 See, crazy, weary, joyless eild,
 Wi' wrinkled face,
 Comes hostin', hirplin' owre the field, coughing—limping
 Wi' creepin' pace.

When ance life's day draws near the gloamin', twilight
 Then fareweel vacant careless roamin';
 And fareweel cheerfu' tankards foamin',
 And social noise;
 And fareweel dear, deluding woman !
 The joy of joys !

Oh, Life ! how pleasant in thy morning,
 Young Fancy's rays the hills adorning !
 Cold-pausing Caution's lesson scorning,
 We brisk away,
 Like school-boys, at the expected warning,
 To joy and play.

We wander there, we wander here,
 We eye the rose upon the brier,
 Unmindful that the thorn is near,
 Among the leaves !
 And though the puny wound appear,
 Short while it grieves.¹

Some, lucky, find a flowery spot,
 For which they never toiled or swat ;
 They drink the sweet and eat the fat,
 But care or pain ;
 And, haply, eye the barren hut
 Without high disdain.

With steady aim some fortune chase ;
 Keen hope does every sinew brace ;
 Through fair, through foul, they urge the race,
 And seize the prey :
 Then cannie, in some cozie place,
 quietly—snug
 They close the day.

And others, like your humble servan',
 Poor wights ! nae rules nor roads observin' ;
 To right or left, eternal swervin'
 They zigzag on ;
 Till curst with age, obscure and starvin',
 They often groan.

Alas ! what bitter toil and straining—
 But truce with peevish, poor complaining !
 Is Fortune's fickle Luna waning ?
 E'en let her gang !
 Beneath what light she has remaining,
 Let's sing our sang.

¹ ‘Where can we find a more exhilarating enumeration of the enjoyments of youth, contrasted with their successive extinction as age advances, than in the *Epistle to James Smith?*’—PROFESSOR WALKER.

My pen I here fling to the door,
And kneel, 'Ye Powers,' and warm implore,
'Though I should wander Terra o'er,
In all her climes,
Grant me but this, I ask no more,
Aye rowth o' rhymes. abundance

' Gie dreeping roasts to country lairds,
Till icicles hing frae their beards ;
Gie fine braw claes to fine life-guards,
And maids of honour !
And yill and whisky gie to cairds,
Until they sconner.

' A title, Dempster¹ merits it;
A garter gie to Willie Pitt;
Gie wealth to some be-ledgered cit,
 In cent. per cent.
But give me real, sterling wit,
 And I'm content.

' While ye are pleased to keep me hale,
I 'll sit down o'er my scanty meal,
Be 't water-brose, or muslin-kail,²
Wi' cheerfu' face,
As lang 's the Muses dinna fail
To say the grace.'

An anxious e'e I never throws
Behint my lug or by my nose;
I jounk beneath Misfortune's blows stoop
As weel's I may;
Sworn foe to Sorrow, Care, and Prose,
I rhyme away.

¹ George Dempster of Dunnichen, then a conspicuous orator in parliament, and a friend to all patriotic institutions in his native land. He commenced his parliamentary career in 1762, closed it in 1790, and died in 1818 at the age of eighty-two.

² Broth made without meat.

Nae hairbrained, sentimental traces,
 In your unlettered nameless faces !
 In arioso trills and graces
 Ye never stray,
 But gravissimo, solemn basses
 Ye hum away.

Ye are sae grave, nae doubt ye 're wise ;
 Nae ferly though ye do despise
 The hairum-scairum, ram-stam boys,
 The rattling squad :
 I see you upward cast your eyes—
 Ye ken the road.

wonder
heedless

Whilst I—but I shall haud me there—
 Wi' you I'll scarce gang ony where—
 Then, Jamie, I shall say nae mair,
 But quat my sang,
 Content with you to mak a pair,
 Whare'er I gang.¹

It is pretty evident from this poem, that at the time of its composition Burns had thought of publishing, but not found cause to determine him upon committing the act. He is, meanwhile, content to rhyme for the enjoyment it affords him, and to accept his gift of country wit and verse as compensation for his want of the favour of fortune. He indulges in a strain of Epicurean philosophy, which the severest censor might pardon to one condemned to hopeless toils on the leys of Mossiel, and who actually spent half his hours in oppressive melancholy. The bounding sense of enjoyment expressed in this poem is in striking contrast to the sombre tones of *Man was made to Mourn* and the verses *To a Mouse*, probably composed about the same time.

There was, indeed, at this time a contention going on in Burns's mind between the sad consideration of his position in life and those poetical tendencies which might be interpreted as partly the cause of that position being so low. This contention we see traced in the several epistles he had written to his brother poets, Sillar, Lapraik, and Simpson, and to his friend Smith, during the course of the present year of flowing inspiration. It might have been easy for any of these individuals to see, that if Burns only

¹ Smith afterwards had a calico-printing manufactory at Avon, near Linlithgow, but proved unsuccessful. It was his fate to end life where Burns at one time expected to end his—in the West Indies.

could be a successful man of the world by an utter abandonment of the Muse, he never could be so at all, for he invariably ends by taking his rhyming power as a quittance of fortune. At length we have the final struggle between these two contending principles, and the triumph of the Muse, expressed in a poem of the highest strain of eloquence.

THE VISION.

DUAN FIRST.¹

The sun had closed the winter-day,
The curlers quat their roaring play,²
And hungered maukin ta'en her way
To kail-yards green,
While faithless snaws ilk step betray
Whare she has been.

The thrasher's weary flingin'-tree
The lee-lang day had tirèd me ;
And when the day had closed his e'e,
Far i' the west,
Ben i' the spenee,³ right pensivelic,
I gaed to rest.

There, lanelly, by the ingle-cheek,
I sat and eyed the spewing reek,
That filled wi' hoast-provoking smeek
The auld clay biggin' ;
And heard the restless rattons squeak
About the riggin'.

¹ *Duan*, a term of Ossian's for the different divisions of a digressive poem. See his 'Cath-Loda,' vol. ii. of M'Pherson's translation.—*B.*

² Curling is a game nearly peculiar to the southern counties of Scotland. When strong ice can be obtained, a number of individuals, each provided with a large stone of the shape of an oblate spheroid, smoothed on the bottom, and furnished with a handle, range themselves in two sides, to play against each other. The game much resembles bowls, but is more animated, and, from its unavoidable rarity, is much more keenly enjoyed. It is well characterised as a *roaring play*.

³ The parlour of the farmhouse of Mossgiel—its only apartment besides the kitchen—still exists nearly in the state in which it was when the poet described it as the scene of his vision of Coila. ‘Though in every respect humble, and partly occupied by fixed beds, it does not appear uncomfortable. Every consideration, however, sinks beneath the one intense feeling, that here, within these four walls, warmed at this little fireplace, and lighted by this little window [it has but one], lived one of the most extraordinary men; here wrote some of the most celebrated poems of modern times.’—*Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, No. 93.

All in this mottie, misty clime,
 I backward mused on wasted time,
 How I had spent my youthfu' prime,
 And done nae thing,
 But stringin' blethers up in rhyme,
 For fools to sing.

Had I to guid advice but harkit,
 I might, by this, hae led a market,
 Or strutted in a bank, and clarkit
 My cash-account :
 While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-sarkit,
 Is a' th' amount.

I started, muttering, blockhead ! eooof !
 And heaved on high my waukit loof,
 To swear by a' yon starry roof,
 Or some rash aith,
 That I henceforth would be rhyme-proof
 Till my last breath—

When, click ! the string the snick did draw ;
 And, jee ! the door gaed to the wa' ;
 And by my ingle-lowe I saw,
 Now bleezin' bright,
 A tight, outlandish hizzie, braw,
 Come full in sight.

Ye needna doubt I held my whisht ;
 The infant aith, half-formed, was crusht ;
 I glowred as eerie's I'd been dusht
 In some wild glen ;¹
 When sweet, like modest Worth, she blusht,
 And steppèd ben. inward

Green, slender, leaf-clad holly-boughs
 Were twisted gracefu' round her brows ;
 I took her for some Scottish Muse,
 By that same token,
 And come to stop those reckless vows,
 Would soon been broken.

A 'hairbrained, sentimental trace '²
 Was strongly markèd in her face ;
 A wildly-witty, rustic grace
 Shone full upon her ;
 Her eye, even turned on empty space,
 Beamed keen with honour.

¹ 'I stared as full of superstitious fear as if I had been thrown to the ground by meeting a being of the other world in some wild glen.'

² This expression had previously occurred in the *Epistle to James Smith*.

Down flowed her robe, a tartan sheen,
Till half a leg was scrimply seen;
And such a leg ! my bonny Jean¹
 Could only peer it ;
Sae straught, sae taper, tight and elean,²
 Nane else cam near it.

Her mantle large, of greenish hue,
My gazing wonder chiefly drew ;
Deep lights and shades, bold-mingling, threw
 A lustre grand ;
And seemed to my astonished view
 A well-known land.

Here, rivers in the sea were lost ;
There, mountains to the skies were tost :
Here, tumbling billows marked the coast
 With surging foam ;
There, distant shone Art's lofty boast—
 The lordly dome.

Here, Doon poured down his far-fetched floods ;
There, well-fed Irwine stately thuds : sounds
Auld hermit Ayr staw through his woods,
 On to the shore,
And many a lesser torrent scuds runs
 With seeming roar.

Low in a sandy valley spread,
An ancient borough reared her head ;³
Still, as in Scottish story read,
 She boasts a race,
To every nobler virtue bred,
 And polished grace.

By stately tower or palace fair,⁴
Or ruins pendent in the air,
Bold stems of heroes, here and there,
 I could discern ;
Some seemed to muse, some seemed to dare,
 With feature stern.

¹ In the first edition, the line stood thus—

‘ And such a leg ! my Bess, I ween.’

Indignation at the conduct of Jean induced him to take the compliment from her, and bestow it on another person for whom at the time he entertained an admiration. In the first Edinburgh edition, the indignant feeling having subsided, the line was restored as above.

² Clean is often used in Scotland to describe a handsome figure or limb. Such is the sense here.

³ Ayr, whose charter dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century.

⁴ This, and the six ensuing stanzas, were added in the second edition, for the purpose, apparently, of complimenting Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, and other great people who had befriended the author.

My heart did glowing transport feel,
 To see a race¹ heroic wheel,
 And brandish round the deep-dyed steel
 In sturdy blows;
 While back-recoiling seemed to reel
 Their suthron foes.

His Country's saviour,² mark him well!
 Bold Richardton's³ heroic swell;
 The chief on Sark⁴ who glorious fell
 In high command;
 And he whom ruthless fates expl
 His native land.

There, where a sceptred Pictish shade⁵
 Stalked round his ashes lowly laid,
 I marked a martial race, portrayed
 In colours strong;
 Bold, soldier-featured, undismayed
 They strode along.⁶

Through many a wild romantic grove,⁷
 Near many a hermit-fancied cove
 (Fit haunts for friendship or for love),⁸
 In musing mood,
 An aged judge, I saw him rove,
 Dispensing good.

¹ The Wallaces.—*B.*

² William Wallace.—*B.*

³ Adam Wallace of Richardton, cousin to the immortal preserver of Scottish independence.—*B.*

⁴ Wallace, Laird of Craigie, who was second in command, under Douglas, Earl of Ormond, at the famous battle on the banks of Sark, fought in 1448. The glorious victory was principally owing to the judicious conduct and intrepid valour of the gallant Laird of Craigie, who died of his wounds after the action.—*B.*

⁵ Coils, king of the Picts, from whom the district of Kyle is said to take its name, lies buried, as tradition says, near the family-seat of the Montgomeries of Coilsfield, where his burial-place is still shewn.—*B.* The spot pointed out by tradition as the burial-place of Coils, is a small mount marked by a few trees. It was opened, May 29, 1837, when two sepulchral urns were found, attesting that tradition has been at least correct in describing the spot as a burial-place, though whose ashes these were it would be difficult to say.

⁶ The Montgomeries of Coilsfield.

⁷ Barskimming, the seat of the Lord Justice-Clerk.—*B.* (Sir Thomas Miller of Glenlee, afterwards President of the Court of Session.)

⁸ Burns had wandered in this valley with his friend Sillar, and his youthful mistress, Highland Mary.

With deep-struck reverential awe,
The learnèd sire and son I saw,¹
To Nature's God and Nature's law
They gave their lore,
This, all its source and end to draw;
That, to adore.

Brydone's brave ward² I well could spy,
Beneath old Scotia's smiling eye;
Who called on Fame, low standing by,
To hand him on,
Where many a patriot-name on high,
And hero shone.

DUAN SECOND.

With musing-deep, astonished stare,
I viewed the heavenly-seeming fair;
A whispering throb did witness bear
Of kindred sweet,
When with an elder sister's air
She did me greet.

' All hail ! my own inspirèd bard !
In me thy native Muse regard !
Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard,
Thus poorly low !
I come to give thee such reward
As we bestow.

' Know, the great genius of this land
Has many a light, aërial band,
Who, all beneath his high command,
Harmoniously,
As arts or arms they understand,
Their labours ply.

' They Scotia's race among them share ;
Some fire the soldier on to dare ;
Some rouse the patriot up to bate
Corruption's heart :
Some teach the bard, a darling care,
The tuneful art.

¹ The Rev. Dr Matthew Stewart, the celebrated mathematician, and his son, Mr Dugald Stewart, the elegant expositor of the Scotch system of metaphysics, are here meant; their small villa of Catrine being situated on the Ayr.

² Colonel Fullarton.—*B.* This gentleman had travelled under the care of Patriek Brydone, author of a well-known *Tour in Sicily and Malta*.

‘Mong swelling floods of reeking gore,
They, ardent, kindling spirits, pour;
Or, ‘mid the venal senate’s roar,
 They, sightless, stand,
To mend the honest patriot-lorc,
 And grace the hand.

‘And when the bard, or hoary sage,
Charm or instruct the future age,
They bind the wild, poetic rage
 In energy,
Or point the inconclusive page
 Full on the eye.

‘Hence Fullarton, the brave and young ;
Hence Dempster’s zeal-inspirèd¹ tongue ;
Hence sweet harmonious Beattie sung
 His “Minstrel lays ;”
Or tore, with noble ardour stung,
 The sceptic’s bays.

‘To lower orders are assigned
The humbler ranks of humankind,
The rustic bard, the labouring-hind,
 The artisan ;
All choose, as various they’re inclined,
 The various man.

‘When yellow waves the heavy grain,
The threatening storm some, strongly, rein ;
Some teach to meliorate the plain,
 With tillage skill ;
And some instruct the shepherd-train,
 Blithe o’er the hill.

‘Some hint the lover’s harmless wile ;
Some grace the maiden’s artless smile ;
Some soothe the labourer’s weary toil,
 For humble gains,
And make his cottage-scenes beguile
 His cares and pains.

‘Some, bounded to a district-space,
Explore at large man’s infant race,
To mark the embryotic trace
 Of rustic bard ;
And careful note each opening grace,
 A guide and guard.

¹ In first edition—

‘Hence Dempster’s truth-prevailing tongue.’

‘ Of these am I—Coila my name ;¹
 And this district as mine I claim,
 Where once the Campbells,² chiefs of fame,
 Held ruling power :
 I marked thy embryo tuneful flame,
 Thy natal hour.

‘ With future hope, I oft would gaze,
 Fond, on thy little early ways,
 Thy rudely-caroled, chiming phrase,
 In uncouth rhymes,
 Fired at the simple, artless lays,
 Of other times.

‘ I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
 Delighted with the dashing roar ;
 Or when the north his fleecy store
 Drove through the sky,
 I saw grim Nature’s visage hoar
 Struck thy young eye.

‘ Or when the deep green-mantled earth
 Warm cherished every floweret’s birth,
 And joy and music pouring forth
 In every grove,
 I saw thee eye the general mirth
 With boundless love.

‘ When ripened fields, and azure skies,
 Called forth the reaper’s rustling noise,
 I saw thee leave their evening joys,
 And lonely stalk,
 To vent thy bosom’s swelling rise
 In pensive walk.

‘ When youthful love, warm-blushing, strong,
 Keen shivering shot thy nerves along,
 Those accents, grateful to thy tongue,
 Th’ adorèd Name,
 I taught thee how to pour in song,
 To soothe thy flame.

¹ The idea of this visionary being is acknowledged by Burns himself to have been taken from the *Scota* of Mr Alexander Ross, a Mearns poet, author of a pastoral of some merit, entitled *The Fortunate Shepherdess*.

² The Loudoun branch of the Campbells is here meant. Mossgiel and much of the neighbouring ground was the property of the Earl of Loudoun.

'I saw thy pulse's maddening play,
Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way,
Misled by Fancy's meteor-ray,
By passion driven;
But yet the light that led astray
Was light from Heaven.

'I taught thy manners painting strains,
The loves, the wants of simple swains,
Till now, o'er all my wide domains
Thy fame extends;
And some, the pride of Coila's plains,
Become thy friends.

'Thou canst not learn, nor can I shew,
To paint with Thomson's landscape glow;
Or wake the bosom-melting throe,
With Shenstone's art;
Or pour, with Gray, the moving flow
Warm on the heart.

'Yet, all beneath the unrivalled rose,
The lowly daisy sweetly blows;
Though large the forest's monarch throws
His army shade,
Yet green the juicy hawthorn grows
Adown the glade.

'Then never murmur nor repine;
Strive in thy humble sphere to shine;
And, trust me, not Potosi's mine,
Nor king's regard,
Can give a bliss o'ermatching thine,
A rustic bard.

'To give my counsels all in one—
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan;
Preserve the dignity of man,
With soul erect;
And trust, the universal plan
Will all protect.

And wear thou this,' she solemn said,
And bound the holly round my head:

The polished leaves, and berries red,
Did rustling play;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away.¹

The poet is here left reassured and comforted in the all-sufficing grace of the Muse; but no such feeling, however thoroughly once established, could long hold sway over one so sensitive as he to all the harassing problems of his lowly destiny, and to all that met his eye in humble life. At every recoil from the glowing excitement of the social hour, the love-meeting, or the triumphant essay in verse, the deep contemplative melancholy which has been remembered by so many as the reigning expression of his face, again beset him. We have a description of these darker moods of his mind in a poem, otherwise sufficiently remarkable as containing an early specimen of his composition in pure English. In the *Winter Night* we see a reflection of Gray and Collins, as in the *Epistles* we see a reflection of Ramsay.

¹ A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1852, expresses his opinion that Burns was indebted for the idea of *The Vision* to a copy of verses written by the 'melancholy and pensive Wollaston,' so far back as 1681. 'Wollaston's poem was written on the occasion of his leaving, "with a heavy heart," as he says, his beloved Cambridge.' He describes himself as sitting in his own 'small apartment':

'As here one day I sat,
Disposed to ruminant,
Deep melancholy did benumb,
With thoughts of what was past and what to come.'

* * * *

I thought I saw my Muse appear,
Whose dress declared her haste, whose looks her fear;
A wreath of laurel in her hand she bore,
Such laurel as the god Apollo wore.
The piercing wind had backward combed her hair,
And laid a paint of red upon the fair;
Her gown, which, with celestial colour dyed,
Was with a golden girdle tied,
Through speed a little flowed aside,
And decently disclosed her knee;
When, stopping suddenly, she spoke to me:
"What indigested thought, or rash advice,
Has caused thee to apostatise?
Not my ill-use, surely, made thee fly
From thy apprenticeship in poetry."

She paused awhile, with joy and weariness oppressed,
And quick reciprocations of her breast,
She spoke again: "What travel and what care
Have I bestowed! my vehicle of air
How often changed in quest of thee!"'

She concludes, like the Muse of Burns, by counselling him to remain true to her and poetry:

"Suppose the worst, thy passage rough, still I'll be kind,
And breathe upon thy sails behind;
Besides there is a port before:
And every moment thou advancest to the shore,
Where virtuous souls shall better usage find."
Concern and agitation of my head
Waked me; and with the light the phantom fled.'

A WINTER NIGHT.

' Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of the pitiless storm !
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these ?'—SHAKSPEARE.

When biting Boreas, fell and dour,
 Sharp shivers through the leafless bower ;
 When Phœbus gies a short-lived glower
 Far south the lift,
 Dim-darkening through the flaky shower,
 Or whirling drift :

keen—stern
stare
sky

Ae night the storm the steeples rocked,
 Poor Labour sweet in sleep was locked,
 While burns, wi' snawy wreaths up-choked,
 Wild-eddying swirl,
 Or, through the mining outlet bocked,
 Down headlong hurl.

Listening, the doors and winnocks rattle,
 I thought me on the ourie cattle,
 Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
 O' winter war,
 And through the drift, deep-lairing, sprattle,
 Beneath a scaur.

drooping
beating
scramble
cliff

Ilk happing bird, wee, helpless thing,
 That, in the merry months o' spring,
 Delighted me to hear thee sing,
 What comes o' thee ?
 Whare wilt thou cower thy chittering wing,
 And close thy e'e ?

Even you, on murdering errands toiled,
 Lone from your savage homes exiled,
 The blood-stained roost, and sheep-cot spoiled,
 My heart forgets,
 While pitiless the tempest wild
 Sore on you beats.

Now Phœbe, in her midnight reign,
 Dark muffled, viewed the dreary plain ;
 Still crowding thoughts, a pensive train,
 Rose in my soul,
 When on my ear this plaintive strain
 Slow, solemn, stole :—

' Blow, blow, ye winds, with heavier gust !
 And freeze, thou bitter-biting frost !
 Descend, ye chilly, smothering snows !
 Not all your rage, as now united, shews
 More hard unkindness, unrelenting,
 Vengeful malice unrepenting,
 Than heaven-illumined man on brother man bestows !¹

' See stern Oppression's iron grip,
 Or mad Ambition's gory hand,
 Sending, like blood-hounds from the slip,
 Wo, Want, and Murder o'er a land !
 E'en in the peaceful rural vale,
 Truth, weeping, tells the mournful tale,
 How pampered Luxury, Flattery by her side,
 The parasite empoisoning her ear,
 With all the servile wretches in the rear,
 Looks o'er proud Property, extended wide ;
 And eyes the simple rustic hind,
 Whose toil upholds the glittering show,
 A creature of another kind,
 Some coarser substance, unrefined,
 Placed for her lordly use thus far, thus vile below.

' Where, where is Love's fond, tender throe,
 With lordly Honour's lofty brow,
 The powers you proudly own ?
 Is there, beneath Love's noble name,
 Can harbour dark the selfish aim,
 To bless himself alone !
 Mark maiden innocence a prey
 To love-pretending snares,
 This boasted Honour turns away,
 Shunning soft Pity's rising sway,
 Regardless of the tears and unavailing prayers !
 Perhaps this hour, in misery's squalid nest,
 She strains your infant to her joyless breast,
 And with a mother's fears shrinks at the rocking blast !

' Oh ye who, sunk in beds of down,
 Feel not a want but what yourselves create,
 Think for a moment on his wretched fate,
 Whom friends and fortune quite disown !

¹ Blow, blow, thou winter wind ;
 Thou art not so unkind
 As man's ingratitude. . . .
 Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky ;
 Thou dost not bite so nigh
 As benefits forgot. . . . —SHAKSPEARE.

Ill satisfied keen nature's clamorous call,
 Stretched on his straw, he lays himself to sleep,
 While through the ragged roof and chinky wall,
 Chill o'er his slumbers piles the driftèd heap !
 Think on the dungeon's grim confine,
 Where Guilt and poor Misfortune pine,
 Guilt, erring man, relenting view !
 But shall thy legal rage pursue
 The wretch, already crushèd low
 By cruel Fortune's undeservèd blow ?
 Affliction's sons are brothers in distress ;
 A brother to relieve, how exquisite the bliss !'

I heard nae mair, for Chanticleer
 Shook off the pouthery snaw,
 And hailed the morning with a cheer,
 A cottage-rousing craw.

But deep this truth impressed my mind—
 Through all His works abroad,
 The heart benevolent and kind
 The most resembles God.

During the autumn of 1785, Burns had an opportunity of seeing and studying a being in a great measure new to him—a young accomplished lady of the upper classes. Miss Margaret (usually called in old Scottish style, Miss Peggy) K—— was the daughter of a land-proprietor in Carrick: Burns met her at the house of a Mauchline friend, where she was paying a visit. The lively conversation of the young lady, which he interpreted into wit, her youth and beauty, deeply impressed the susceptible poet, and in a spirit of respect suitable to her rank and apparent destiny in life, he made her the subject of a song, which he sent to her enclosed in a letter :—

TO MISS K—.

MADAM—Permit me to present you with the enclosed song, as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have, in these verses, attempted some faint sketches of your portrait in the unembellished, simple manner of descriptive TRUTH. Flattery I leave to your LOVERS, whose exaggerating fancies may make them imagine you still nearer perfection than you really are.

Poets, madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of BEAUTY; as, if they are really POETS of Nature's making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world. In the cheerful bloom of SPRING, or the pensive

mildness of AUTUMN, the grandeur of SUMMER, or the hoary majesty of WINTER, the poet feels a charm unknown to the rest of his species. Even the sight of a fine flower, or the company of a fine woman (by far the finest part of God's works below), have sensations for the poetic heart that the HERD of men are strangers to. On this last account, madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr H.'s kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish, I look on you with pleasure : their hearts, in your presence, may glow with desire, mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your *heart*—that the snares of villainy may never beset you in the road of life—that INNOCENCE may hand you by the path of HONOUR to the dwelling of PEACE—is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

The song was published after the poet's death, under the title of

YOUNG PEGGY.

TUNE—*Last time I came o'er the Muir.*

Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass,
Her blush is like the morning,
The rosy dawn, the springing grass,
With early gems adorning :
Her eyes outshine the radiant beams
That gild the passing shower,
And glitter o'er the crystal streams,
And cheer each freshening flower.

Her lips, more than the cherries bright,
A richer dye has graeed them ;
They charm th' admiring gazer's sight,
And sweetly tempt to taste them :
Her smile is, as the evening, mild,
When feathered tribes are courting,
And little lanibkins wanton wild,
In playful bands disporting.

Were Fortune lovely Peggy's foe,
Such sweetness would relent her,
As blooming Spring unbends the brow
Of surly, savage Winter.
Detraction's eye no aim can gain,
Her winning powers to lessen ;
And fretful Envy grins in vain
The poisoned tooth to fasten.

Ye powers of Honour, Love, and Truth,
From every ill defend her ;
Inspire the highly-favoured youth
The destinies intend her :

Still fan the sweet connubial flame
Responsive in each bosom,
And bless the dear parental name
With many a filial blossom.¹

Alas for these poetical good wishes ! The bard could little imagine the sad fate which was in reality in store for Young Peggy. While this blooming creature of seventeen—for she was no older—appeared to be followed and wooed by a most eligible lover—the youthful representative of the oldest and richest family in Galloway—and thus in the fair way to a dignified position in life, the powers of Honour, Love, and Truth had already been outraged, and a train of circumstances commenced, which was to end in the loss of her good name and her early death.

We have now to see Burns in a different mood. He was, as has been said, no lover of drink, but his social spirit had invested it with many interesting associations in his mind. Looking round for subjects, the poem of Fergusson, entitled *Caller Water*, seems to have suggested to him a similar strain on the artificial beverages of his native country.

SCOTCH DRINK.

' Gie him strong drink, until he wink,
That's sinking in despair ;
And liquor guid, to fire his bluid,
That's prest wi' grief and care ;
There let him boose, and deep carouse,
Wi' bumpers flowing o'er,
Till he forgets his loves or debts,
And minds his griefs no more.'

SOLOMON'S PROVERBS, XXXI. 6, 7.

Let other poets raise a fracas
'Bout vines, and wines, and drucken Bacchus,
And erabbit names and stories wrack us,
And grate our lug,
I sing the juice Scotch beare ean mak us,
In glass or jug.

ear

¹ The letter to Miss K—— appeared, without date, in Cromeck's volume; the song of *Young Peggy*, in Stewart's edition of *Burns's Poems*. Their connection and date, and the

O thou, my Muse ! guid auld Scotch drink ;
 Whether through wimplin' worms thou jink, steal
 Or, richly brown, ream o'er the brink,
 In glorious faem,
 Inspire me, till I lisp and wink,
 To sing thy name !

Let husky wheat the haughs adorn,
 And aits set up their awnie horn, bearded
 And peas and beans, at e'en or morn,
 Perfume the plain,
 Leeze me on thee, John Barleycorn,
 Thou king o' grain !

On thee aft Scotland chows her cood,
 In souple scones, the wale o' food ! barley-cakes—choice
 Or tumblin' in the boilin' flood
 Wi' kail and beef ;
 But when thou pours thy strong heart's blood,
 There thou shines chief.

Food fills the wame, and keeps us livin' ;
 Though life's a gift no worth receivin',
 When heavy dragged wi' pine and grievin' ;
 But, oiled by thee,
 The wheels o' life gae down-hill scievin', gliding
 Wi' rattlin' glee.

Thou clears the head o' doited Lear ;
 Thou cheers the heart o' drooping Care ;
 Thou strings the nerves o' Labour sair,
 At's weary toil ;
 Thou even brightens dark Despair
 Wi' gloomy smile.

manner of the poet's acquaintance with the lady, are given on the authority of his sister, who has a tolerably clear recollection of the circumstances.

' Burns met Miss K—— at Mr Hamilton's, where she lived some time. My mother remembers a conversation between Robert and Gilbert, on the *har'st rig*, respecting the young lady and the song which had been written upon her. Gilbert said he did not think quite so much of her. Robert said she had a great deal of wit. One Sarah Weir, who was often about Mr Hamilton's, working, and knew them all well, was shearing on the same ridge with my mother. At the poet's remark about the wit of Miss K——, Sarah stopped and asked him if it was not of a shallow kind. The bard only replied with a look of contempt, which greatly amused my mother at the time, and which still remains imprinted on her memory.'—*Letter of Isabella Begg, October 1850.*

Aft clad in massy siller weed,
Wi' gentles thou erects thy head ;¹
Yet humbly kind in time o' need,
 The poor man's winc,
His wee drap parritch, or his bread,
 Thou kitchens fine.²

relishest

Thou art the life o' public haunts ;
But thee, what were our fairs and rants ?
Even godly meetings o' the saunts,
 By thee inspired,
When gaping they besiege the tents,³
 Are doubly fired.

Without

'That merry night we get the corn in,
O sweetly then thou reams the horn in !
Or reekin' on a New-year morning
 In cog or bicker,
And just a wee drap sp'ritual burn in,
 And gusty sucker !

wooden vessels

sugar

When Vulcan gies his bellows breath,
And ploughmen gather wi' their graith,
Oh rare ! to see thes fizz and freath
 I' the lugget caup !
Then Burnewin comes on like death
 At every chap.

implements

eared cup

Blacksmith

Nae mercy, then, for airn or steel ;
The brawnie, bainie, ploughman chiel,
Brings hard overhip, wi' sturdy wheel,
 The strong forehammer,
Till block and studdie ring and reel
 Wi' dinsome clamour.

When skirlin' weanies see the light,
Thou maks the gossipis clatter bright,
How fumblin' cuifs their dearies slight ;
 Wae worth the name !

screaming infants

fools

Nae howdie gets a social night,
 Or plack frac them.

midwife

coin

¹ As ale in silver mugs, at the tables of the wealthy.

² Brisk small-beer is a favourite relish to porridge in Scotland. This humane passage redeems much that is objectionable in the poem.

³ Sitting round the movable pulpits erected in the open air at parochial celebrations of the communion.—See notes to *Holy Fair*.

When neebors anger at a plea,
And just as wud as wud can be,
How easy can the barley-bree

Cement the quarrel !

It's aye the cheapest lawyer's fee
To tastc the barrel.

mad

Alake ! that e'er my Muse has reason
To wyte her countrymen wi' treason !
But monie daily weet their weason

Wi' liquors nice,

And hardly, in a winter's season,
E'er spier her price.

blame

throat

ask

Wae worth that brandy, burning trash !

Fell sourcee o' monie a pain and brash !

'Twins monic a poor, doylt, drucken hash,
O' half his days ;

And sends, beside, auld Scotland's cash
To her warst faes.

sickness

rough fellow

Ye Scots, wha wish auld Scotland well,
Ye chief, to you my tale I tell,

Poor plackless devils like myscl',
It sets you ill,

Wi' bitter, dearthfu' wincs to mell,
Or foreign gill.

meddle

May gravels round his blather wrench,
And gouts torment him inch by inch,
Wha twists his gruntle wi' a glunch

O' sour disdain,

Out owre a glass o' whisky-punch
Wi' honest men !

mouth—frown

Oh whisky ! soul o' plays and pranks !
Accept a Bardie's grataefu' thanks !
When wanting thee, what tuneless cranks
Are my poor verses !
Thou comes—they rattle i' their ranks
At ither's —— !

Thee, Ferintosh ! oh sadly lost !
Scotland lament frae coast to coast !
Now colic grips, and barkin' hoast,

May kill us a' ;

For loyal Forbes' chartered boast
Is ta'en awa !¹

cough

¹ For services and expenses on the public account at the Revolution, Forbes of Cullen was empowered, by an act of the Scottish Parliament in 1690, to distil whisky on his barony of

Thae curst horse-leeches o' th' Excise,
 Wha mak the whisky-stells their prize !
 Haud up thy han', Deil ! ancc, twice, thrice !
 There, seize the blinkers !
 And bake them up in brunstanc pies
 For poor d——d drinkers.

Fortune ! if thou 'll but gie me still
 Hale breekis, a scone, and whisky-gill,
 And rowth o' rhyme to rave at will,
 Tak a' the rest,
 And deal 't about as thy blind skill
 Directs thee best.

barley-eako
abundance

The subject here broached is taken up in another poem, of even greater mettle than the preceding. Towards the close of the year 1785, loud complaints were made by the Scottish distillers respecting the vexatious and oppressive manner in which the Excise laws were enforced at their establishments—such rigour, they said, being exercised at the instigation of the London distillers, who looked with jealousy on the success of their northern brethren. So great was the severity of the Excise, that many distillers were obliged to abandon the trade, and the price of barley was beginning to be affected. Illicit distillation was also found to be alarmingly on the increase. In consequence of the earnest remonstrances of the distillers, backed by the county gentlemen, an act was passed in the session of 1786 (alluded to by the author), whereby the duties on low wines, spirits, &c., were discontinued, and an annual tax imposed on stills, according to their capacity. This act gave general satisfaction. It seems to

Ferintosh, in Cromartyshire, free of duty. This inconsiderately conferred privilege in time became the source of a great revenue to the family; and *Ferintosh* was at length recognised as something like a synonym for whisky, so much of it was there distilled. By the act respecting the Scotch distilleries in 1785, this privilege was declared to be abolished, the Lords of the Treasury being left to make such compensation to the existing Mr Forbes as should be deemed just, or, should they fail to make a satisfactory arrangement, the case was to be decided by a jury before the Scottish Court of Exchequer. The Lords failing to satisfy Mr Forbes, the case was accordingly tried by a jury, November 29, 1785, when it was shewn by Mr Henry Erskine, the plaintiff's counsel, that the privilege could be made to yield no less than £7000 a year to the family, though the actual annual gains from it, at an average of the last thirteen years, was but a little more than £1000. He further shewed, that while the right was an undoubted piece of property, which nothing could justly take away, the family had not failed to deserve it, as they had ever continued useful and loyal servants to the government: Mr Duncan Forbes, the late Lord President, having, in particular, spent no less than £20,000 of his private fortune in suppressing the rebellion of 1745-6. The jury surprised the Lords of the Treasury by decreeing the sum of £21,580 for 'loyal Forbes' chartered boast.'

have been during the general outcry against fiscal oppression at the end of 1785, or beginning of 1786, that Burns composed

THE AUTHOR'S EARNEST CRY AND PRAYER
TO THE SCOTCH REPRESENTATIVES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

' Dearest of distillation ! last and best !
How art thou lost !'—PARODY ON MILTON.

Ye Irish lords, ye knights and squires,
Wha represent our brughs and shires,
And doucely manage our affairs
In parliament, soberly
To you a simple Bardie's prayers
Are humbly sent.

Alas ! my roopit¹ Muse is hearse !
Your honours' heart wi' grief 'twad pierce,
To see her sittin' on her ——
Low i' the dust,
And screechin' out prosaic verse,
And like to burst !

Tell them wha hae the chief direction,
Scotland and me's in great affliction,
E'er sin' they laid that curst restriction
On aqua vitae ;
And rouse them up to strong conviction,
And move their pity.

Stand forth, and tell yon Premier youth,²
The honest, open, naked truth :
Tell him o' mine and Scotland's drouth,
His servants humble :
The muckle devil blaw ye south,
If ye dissemble.

Does ony great man glunch and gloom ?
Speak out, and never fash your thoom !
Let posts and pensions sink or soom
Wi' them wha grant 'em :
If honestly they canna come,
Far better want 'em.

¹ A person at the last stage of cold in the throat is said in Scotland to be *roopit*. The word is not in Jamieson.

² Mr Pitt.

In gath'rin' votes you were na slack;
 Now stand as tightly by your tack;
 Ne'er claw your lug, and fidge your back,
 And hum and haw;
 But raise your arm, and tell your crack,
 Before them a'.

ear—shrug

speech

Paint Scotland greeting owre her thrissle,
 Her mutchikin stoup as toom's a whistle;
 And d——d exciseman in a bussle,
 Seizin' a stell,
 Triumphant crushin' t like a mussel
 Or lampit shell.

weeping
empty

Then on the tither hand present her,
 A blackguard smuggler, right behint her,
 And cheek-for-chow, a chuffie vintner,
 Colleaguing join,
 Picking her pouch as bare as winter
 Of a' kind coin.

fat-faced

Is there, that bears the name o' Scot,
 But feels his heart's bluid rising hot,
 To see his poor auld mither's pot
 Thus dung in staves,
 And plundered o' her hindmost groat
 By gallows knaves?

Alas! I'm but a nameless wight,
 Trod i' the mire out o' sight!
 But could I like Montgomerics fight,¹
 Or gab like Boswell,²
 There's some sark-necks I wad draw tight,
 And tie some hose well.

God bless your honours, can ye see 't,
 The kind, auld, cantie carlin greet,
 And no get warmly to your feet,
 And gar them hear it,
 And tell them with a patriot heat,
 Ye winna bear it?

cheerful old wife

¹ The poet here alludes, in chief, to Hugh Montgomery of Coilsfield, representative of Ayrshire in parliament, and subsequently twelfth Earl of Eglintoun. He had served as an officer in the American war.

² James Boswell of Auchinleck, the well-known biographer of Johnson. He frequently spoke at the Ayrshire county meetings.

Some o' you nicely ken the laws,
 To round the period and pause,
 And wi' rhetoric clause on clause
 To mak harangues;
 Then echo through Saint Stephen's wa's
 Auld Scotland's wrangs.

Dempster,¹ a true blue Seot I 'se warran';
 Thee, aith-detesting, chaste Kilkerran;²
 And that glib-gabber Highland baron,
 The Laird o' Graham;³ ready-tongued
 And aye, a chap that's d——d auldfarran,⁴ sagacious
 Dundas his name.⁴

Erskine,⁵ a spunkie Norland billie;
 True Campbells, Frederick⁶ and Ilay;⁷
 And Livingstone, the bauld Sir Willie;
 And mony others,
 Whom auld Demosthenes or Tully
 Might own for brithers.

See, sodger Hugh, my watchman stented,
 If bardies c'er are represented;
 I ken if that your sword were wanted,
 Ye'd lend a hand,
 But when there's ought to say aenent it,
 Ye're at a stand.⁸

¹ George Dempster of Dunnichen. See the *Epistle to James Smith*, and *The Vision*.

² Sir Adam Ferguson of Kilkerran, Bart. He had several times represented Ayrshire, but at present was member for the city of Edinburgh.

³ The Marquis of Graham, eldest son of the Duke of Montrose. He became the third Duke of Montrose, and died in 1836.

⁴ The Right Hon. Henry Dundas, Treasurer of the Navy, and M.P. for Edinburghshire, afterwards Viscount Melville.

⁵ Probably Thomas Erskine, afterwards Lord Erskine; but he was not then in parliament.

⁶ Lord Frederick Campbell, second brother of the Duke of Argyle, Lord Register of Scotland, and M.P. for the county of Argyle in this, and the one preceding, and the two subsequent parliaments.

⁷ Ilay Campbell, Lord Advocate for Scotland, representative in this parliament of the Glasgow group of burghs. He was afterwards President of the Court of Session, and died in 1823 at an advanced age.

⁸ This stanza, alluding to the imperfect elocution of the gallant Montgomery of Coilsfield, was omitted from the poem by the author.

Arouse, my boys ! exert your mettle,
 To get auld Scotland back her kettle ;
 Or faith ! I 'll wad my new plough-pettle, pledge
 Ye 'll see 't or lang, ere
 She 'll teach you wi' a reekin' whittle, knife
 Anither sang.

This while she 's been in crankous mood,
 Her lost militia¹ fired her bluid ;
 (Deil na they never mair do guid,
 Played her that pliskie !) trick
 And now she 's like to rin red-wud mad
 About her whisky.

And L— ! if ance they pit her till 't,
 Her tartan petticoat she 'll kilt,
 And durk and pistol at her belt,
 She 'll tak the streets,
 And rin her whittle to the hilt
 I ' th' first she meets !

For G— sake, sirs ! then speak her fair,
 And straik her cannie wi' the hair,
 And to the muckle house repair,
 Wi' instant speed,
 And strive, wi' a' your wit and lear,
 To get remead.

Yon ill-tongued tinkler, Charlie Fox,
 May taunt you wi' his jeers and mocks ;
 But gie him 't het, my hearty cocks !
 E'en cow the cadie ! fellow
 And send him to his dicing-box
 And sportin' lady.

Tell yon guid bluid o' auld Boconnocks,²
 I 'll be his debt twa mashlum bannocks,³

¹ A militia bill for Scotland was introduced into parliament in 1782, when the country was in danger of French and Dutch invasion. The Rockingham ministry, perhaps taking alarm at the attitude of the Irish militia, proposed a clause at the third reading for facilitating enlistment from the designed militia into the army; and the bill, being declined in this form by Dempster and other patriots, was lost.

² Mr Pitt's father, the Earl of Chatham, was the second son of Robert Pitt of Boconnock, in the county of Cornwall.

³ ‘ Scones made from a mixture of oats, peas, or beans, with wheat or barley, ground fine, and denominated *mashlum*, are in general use, and form a wholesome and palatable food.’—*New Statistical Account of Scotland, parish of Dalry, Ayrshire*.

And drink his health in auld Nanse Tinnock's¹
 Nine times a week,
 If he some scheme, like tea and winnoeks,²
 Wad kindly seek.

Could he some commutation broach,
 I'll pledge my aith in guid braid Scotch,
 He need na fear their foul reproach,
 Nor erudition,
 Yon mixtie-maxtie queer hotch-potch,
 The Coalition.

Auld Scotland has a raucle tongue ; stout
 She's just a devil wi' a rung ; bludgeon
 And if she promise auld or young
 To tak their part,
 Though by the neck she should be strung,
 She'll no desert.

And now, ye chosen Five-and-Forty,
 May still your mither's heart support ye ;
 Then, though a minister grow dory,
 And kick your place,
 Ye'll snap your fingers poor and hearty,
 Before his face.

God bless your honours a' your days,
 Wi' sowps o' kail and brats o' claise,
 In spite o' a' the thievish kaes
 That haunt St Jamie's ! jackdaws
 Your humble Poet sings and prays,
 While Rab his name is.

POSTSCRIPT.

Let half-starved slaves in warmer skies
 See future wines, rich clust'ring, rise ;
 Their lot auld Scotland ne'er envies,
 But blithe and frisky,
 She eyes her freeborn, martial boys
 Tak aff their whisky.

¹ A worthy old hostess of the author's in Mauchline, where he sometimes studies politics over a glass of guid auld Scotch drink.—*B.* Nanse's story was different. On seeing the poem, she declared that the poet had never been but once or twice in her house. A portrait of Nanse was taken by Brooks in 1799, and has been engraved.

² The young Chancellor of the Exchequer had gained some credit by a measure introduced in 1784 for preventing smuggling of tea by reducing the duty, the revenue being compensated by a tax on windows.

What though their Phœbus kinder warms,
While fragrance blooms and beauty charms !
When wretches range, in famished swarms,
 The scented groves,
Or hounded forth, dishonour arms
 In hungry droves.

Their gun 's a burden on their shouther ;
They downa bide the stink o' powther ;
Their bauldest thought 's a hank'ring swither
 To stan' or rin,
Till skelp—a shot—they're aff, a'throwther,
 To save their skin.

uncertainty

But bring a Scotchman frae his hill,
Clap in his cheek a Highland gill,
Say such is royal George's will,
 And there's the foc,
He has nae thought but how to kill
 Twa at a blow.

Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him ;
Death comes—wi' fearless eye he sees him ;
Wi' bluidy han' a welcome gies him ;
 And when he fa's,
His latest draught o' breathin' lea'es him
 In faint huzzas !

Sages their solemn cen may steek,
And raise a philosophie reek,
And physically causes seek,
 In clime and season ;
But tell me whisky's name in Greck,
 I'll tell the reason.

slut

Scotland, my auld, respected mither !
Though whiles ye moistify your leather,
Till whare ye sit, on craps o' heather
 Ye tine your dam ;
Freedom and whisky gang thegither !—
 Tak aff your dram !

lose

To the early part of 1786 may be referred a poem which seems to have attracted less attention than most others of the same degree of effort, but which, we think, presents a most pleasing strain of that benevolent feeling which Burns entertained towards

the humbler animals. He here assumes a fictitious character—that of an old farmer:

THE AULD FARMER'S NEW-YEAR MORNING SALUTATION
TO HIS AULD MARE MAGGIE,

ON GIVING HER THE ACCUSTOMED RIPP OF CORN TO HANSEL IN THE NEW YEAR.

A guid New-year I wish thee, Maggie !	
Hae, there's a ripp to thy auld baggie :	handful
Though thou's howe-backit, now, and knaggie,	bony
I've seen the day	
Thou could hae gaen like ony staggie	colt
Out-owre the lay.	
Though now thou's dowie, stiff, and crazy,	drooping
And thy auld hide's as white's a daisy,	
I've seen thee dappl't, sleek, and glaizie,	
A bonny gray :	
He should been tight that daur't to raize thee	excite
Ance in a day.	
Thou ance was i' the foremost rank,	
A filly buirdly, steeve, and swank,	firm—stately
And set weel down a shapely shank	
As e'er tread yird ;	
And could hae flown out-owre a stank	morass
Like ony bird.	
It's now some nine-and-twenty year,	
Sin' thou was my guid-father's meare ;	
He gied me thee, o' tocher clear,	dowry
And fifty mark ;	
Though it was sma', 'twas weel-won gear,	
And thou was stark.	strong
When first I gaed to woo my Jenny,	
Ye then was trottin' wi' your minnie :	mother
Though ye was trickie, slee, and funnie,	
Ye ne'er was donsie :	mischievous
But hamely, tawie, ¹ quict, and cannie,	
And unco sonsie.	engaging
That day ye pranced wi' muckle pride,	
When ye bure hame my bonny bride :	
And sweet and gracefu' she did ride,	
Wi' maiden air !	
Kyle-Stewart I could braggèd wide,	
For sic a pair.	

¹ That allows itself peaceably to be handled.

Though now ye dow but hoyte and hobble, can—limp
 And wintle like a saumont-coble, twist
 That day ye was a jinker noble, runner
 For heels and win' !
 And ran them till they a' did wauble reel
 Far, far behin' !

When thou and I were young and skeigh, high-mettled
 And stable-meals at fairs were dreigh, tedious
 How thou would prance, and snore, and skreigh,
 And tak the road !
 Town's bodies ran, and stood abeigh, off
 And ea't thee mad.

When thou was corn't, and I was mellow,
 We took the road aye like a swallow :
 At brooses¹ thou had ne'er a fellow
 For pith and speed ;
 But every tail thou pay't them hollow,
 Whare'er thou gaed.

The sma' droop-rumpl't, hunter cattle,
 Might aiblins waur't thee for a brattle ; perhaps—race
 But sax Scotch miles thou try't their mettle,
 And gar't them whaizle : whizzee
 Nae whip nor spur, but just a wattle
 O' saugh or hazle.

Thou was a noble fittie-lan',²
 As e'er in tug or tow was drawn !
 Aft thee and I, in aught hours' gaun,
 In guid March weather,
 Hae turned sax rood beside our han'
 For days thegither.

Thou never braindg't, and fetch't, and fliskit, raged—kicked
 But thy auld tail thou wad hae whisket,
 And spread abreed thy weel-filled brisket breast
 Wi' pith and power,
 Till spritty knowes wad rair't and risket,
 And slypet owre.³

¹ A race at a marriage is called a *broose*.

² The near horse of the hindmost pair in the plough.

³ 'Till hillocks, where the earth was full of tough-rooted plants, would have given forth a cracking sound, and the clods gently fallen over.'

When frosts lay lang, and snaws were deep,
And threatened labour back to keep,
I gied thy cog a wee bit heap
 Aboon the timmer;
I kenn'd my Maggie wad na sleep
 For that, or simmer.

ere

In cart or car thou never reestit;
The steyest brae thou wad hae fac't it;
Thou never lap, and sten't, and breastit,
 Then stood to blaw;
But just thy step a wee thing hastit,
 Thou snoov't awa'.

steepest
reared

pushed on

My pleugh is now thy bairn-time a';
Four gallant brutes as e'er did draw;¹
Forbye sax mae I've sell't awa',
 That thou hast nurst:
They drew me thretteen pund and twa,
 The very warst.

Monie a sair daurk we twa hae wrought, day's work
And wi' the weary warl' fought!
And monie an anxious day I thought
 We wad be beat!
Yet here to crazy age we're brought,
 Wi' something yet.

And think na, my auld trusty servan',
That now perhaps thou's less deservin',
And thy auld days may end in starvin',
 For my last fow,
A heapit stimpard,² I'll reserve ane
 Laid by for you.

We've worn to crazy years thegither;
We'll toyte about wi' ane anither; move
Wi' tentie care I'll flit thy tether,
 To some hain'd rig,
Where ye may nobly rax your leather,
 Wi' sma' fatigue.

saved ridge

stretch

'The tale of the *Twa Dogs*,' says Gilbert Burns, 'was composed after the resolution of publishing was nearly taken. Robert had a dog, which he called Luath, that was a great favourite. The dog had been killed by the wanton cruelty of some person the

¹ Meaning—all the four horses now working in my plough are thy progeny.

² The eighth part of a bushel.

night before my father's death. Robert said to me that he should like to confer such immortality as he could bestow on his old friend Luath, and that he had a great mind to introduce something into the book under the title of Stanzas to the Memory of a Quadruped Friend; but this plan was given up for the poem as it now stands. Cæsar was merely the creature of the poet's imagination, created for the purpose of holding chat with his favourite Luath.'

THE TWA DOGS:

A TALE.

'Twas in that place o' Scotland's isle
That bears the name o' Auld King Coil,¹
Upon a bonny day in June,
When wearin through the afternoon,
Twa dogs that were na thrang at hame,
Forgathered ance upon a time.

Encountered

The first I'll name, they ea'd him Cæsar,
Was keepit for his honour's pleasure;
His hair, his size, his mouth, his lugs,
Shewed he was nane o' Scotland's dogs,
But whalpit some placee far abroad,
Whare sailors gang to fish for cod.

His lockèd, lettered, braw brass-collar,
Shewed him the gentleman^{*}and scholar;
But though he was o' high degree,
The fient a pride—nae pride had he;
But wad hae spent an hour caressin',
E'en wi' a tinkler-gipsy's messan.
eur

At kirk or market, mill or smiddie,
Nae tawted tyke, though e'er sae duddie, dirty—ragged
But he wad stan't, as glad to see him,
And stroan't on stanes and hillocks wi' him.

¹ Kyle, the middle district of Ayrshire. The portion to the north of the river Ayr is distinguished as Kyle-Stewart, having once belonged to that family, and afterwards to the eldest son of the sovereign. This was the district in which Burns had lived since his nineteenth year.

Kyle is supposed by the old antiquaries to derive its name from Coilus, king of the Piets—a mere myth. Modern antiquaries, with perhaps no better grounds, derive the word from *choille*, Gaelic for wood. It may be from *caol* (pronounced kyle), Gaelic for a firth or sound, with reference to the arm of the sea which bounds the district to the west—a term which gives name to a strait to the north of Bute island, not far off, and which is also supposed to be the origin of the name Calais.

The tither was a ploughman's collie,
 A rhyming, ranting, roving billie,
 Wha for his friend and comrade had him,
 And in his freaks had Luath ca'd him,
 After some dog in Highland sang,¹
 Was made lang syne—Lord knows how lang !

He was a gash and faithful tyke,	
As ever lap a sheugh or dike.	ditch
His honest, sonsie, baws'nt face, ²	
Aye gat him friends in ilka place.	each
His breast was white, his touzie back	shaggy
Weel clad wi' coat o' glossy black ;	
His gaucy tail, wi' upward curl,	jolly
Hung o'er his hurdies wi' a swirl.	hips
Nae doubt but they were fain o' ither,	fond
And unco pack and thick thegither ;	intimate
Wi' social nose whyles snuffed and snowkit,	
Whyles mice and moudieworts they howkit ; dug	
Whyles scoured awa' in lang excursion,	
And worried ither in diversion ;	
Until wi' daffin' weary grown,	sporting
Upon a knowe they sat them down,	hillock
And there began a lang digression	
Abont the lords o' the creation.	

CÆSAR.

I've often wondered, honest Luath,
 What sort o' life poor dogs like you have ;
 And when the gentry's life I saw,
 What way poor bodies lived ava.

Our laird gets in his racked rents,
 His coals, his kain,³ and a' his stents ;⁴
 He rises when he likes himsel' ;
 His flunkies answer at the bell ;
 He ca's his coach, he ca's his horse ;
 He draws a bonny silken purse
 As lang's my tail, whare, through the steeks, stitches
 The yellow lettered Geordie keeks. peeps

Frae morn to c'en its nougt but toiling,
 At baking, roasting, frying, boiling ;

¹ Cuchullin's dog in Ossian's *Fingal*.—B.

² Having a white stripe down the face.

³ Rent in the shape of farm-produce.

⁴ Assessments.

And though the gentry first are steechin,
Yet e'en the ha' folk fill their pechan
Wi' sauce, ragouts, and sic-like trashtrie,
That's little short o' downright wastrie.
Our whipper-in, wee blastit wonner,
Poor worthless elf, it eats a dinner
Better than ony tenant man
His honour has in a' the lan';
And what poor cot-folk pit their painch in, stomach
I own it's past my comprehension.

stuffing
kitchen-people

L U A T H.

Trowth, Cæsar, whyles they're fash't enough; troubled
A cotter howkin' in a sheugh,
Wi' dirty stanes biggin' a dike,
Barring a quarry, and sic-like:
Himself, a wife, he thus sustains,
A smytrie o' wee duddie weans,
And nought but his han' darg, to keep day's work
Them right and tight in thack and rape.

And when they meet wi' sair disasters,
Like loss o' health, or want o' masters,
Ye maist wad think, a wee touch langer,
And they maun starve o' cauld and hunger;
But how it comes, I never kenn'd yet,
They're maistly wonderfu' contented:
And buirdly chielis, and clever hizzies, stately—girls
Are bred in sic a way as this is.

CÆSAR.

But then to see how ye're neglectit,
How huffed, and cuffed, and disrespeckit!
L—, man, our gentry care as little
For delvers, ditchers, and sic cattle;
They gang as saucy by poor folk,
As I wad by a stinkin' brock. badger
I've noticed, on our Laird's court-day,
And monie a time my heart's been wae,
Poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,
How they maun thole a factor's snash : bear with
He'll stamp and threaten, curse and swear,
He'll apprehend them, poind their gear;
While they maun stan', wi' aspect humble,
And hear it a', and fear and tremble!

I see how folk live that hae riches;
But surely poor folk maun be wretches!

L U A T H.

They're no sae wretched's ane wad think ;
 Though constantly on poortith's brink : poverty
 They're sae accustomed wi' the sight,
 The view o't gies them little fright.
 Then chance and fortune are sae guided,
 They're aye in less or mair provided ;
 And though fatigued wi' close employment,
 A blink o' rest's a sweet enjoyment.

The dearest comfort o' their lives,
 Their grushie weans and faithfu' wives ; thriving
 The prattling things are just their pride,
 That sweetens a' their fireside ;
 And whyles twalpennie worth¹ o' nappy
 Can mak the bodies unco happy ; ale
 They lay aside their private cares,
 To mind the Kirk and State affairs :
 They'll talk o' patronage and priests,
 Wi' kindling fury in their breasts,
 Or tell what new taxation's comin',
 And ferlie at the folk in Lon'on. wonder

As bleak-faced Hallowmas returns,
 They get the jovial, ranting kirns,
 When rural life o' every station
 Unite in common recreation ;
 Love blinks, Wit slaps, and social Mirth
 Forgets there's Care upo' the earth.

That merry day the year begins,
 They bar the door on frosty win's ;
 The nappy reeks wi' mantling ream,
 And sheds a heart-inspiring steam :
 The luntin' pipe, and sneeshin-mill,
 Are handed round wi' right guidwill ;
 The cantic auld folks crackin' crouse,
 The young anes rantin' through the house— talking briskly
 My heart has been sae fain to see them,
 That I for joy hae barkit wi' them.

Still it's owre true that ye hae said,
 Sic game is now owre often played.
 There's monie a creditable stock
 O' decent, honest, fawsont fo'k seemly
 Are riven out baith root and branch,
 Some rascal's pridefu' greed to quench,

¹ A pennyworth, twelve pence of Scotch money being equal to one penny sterling.

Wha thinks to knit himsel' the faster
In favour wi' some gentle master,
Wha aiblins thrang a parliamentin',
For Britain's guid his saul indentin'—

CÆSAR.

Haith, lad, ye little ken about it;
For Britain's guid! guid faith, I doubt it.
Say rather, gaun as Premiers lead him,
And saying Ay or No's they bid him:
At operas and plays parading,
Mortgaging, gambling, masquerading;
Or maybe, in a frolic daft,
To Hague or Calais takes a waft,
To mak a tour and tak a whirl,
To learn *bon ton*, and see the worl'.

There, at Vienna or Versailles,
He rives his father's auld entails ; tears
Or by Madrid he takes the route,
To thrum guitars, and fecht wi' nowte ; bullocks
Or down Italian vista startles,
W—— hunting amang groves o' myrtles ;
Then bouses drumly German water,
To mak himsel' look fair and fatter,
And clear the consequential sorrows,
Love-gifts of Carnival signoras.

For Britain's guid!—for her destruction!
Wi' dissipation, feud, and faction.

LUA TII.

Hech, man ! dear sirs ! is that the gate
They waste sae mony a braw estate !
Are we sae foughten and harassed
For gear to gang that gate at last !

Oh would they stay aback frae courts,
And please themsel's wi' country sports,
It wad for every aue be better,
The Laird, the Tenant, and the Cotter !
For thae frank, rantin', ramblin' billies,
Fient haet o' them 's ill-hearted fellows ;
Except for breakin' o' their timmer,
Or speakin' lightly o' their limmer,
Or shootin' o' a hare or moorecock,
The ne'er a bit they're ill to poor folk.

But will ye tell me, Master Cæsar,
 Sure great folk's life's a life o' pleasure?
 Nae cauld or hunger e'er can steer them,
 The very thought o't needna fear them.

CÆSAR.

L—, man, were ye but whyles whare I am,
 The gentles ye wad ne'er envy 'em.
 It's true they needna starve or sweat,
 Through winter's cauld, or simmer's heat;
 They've nae sair wark to craze their banes,
 And fill auld age wi' grips and granes;
 But human bodies are sic fools,
 For a' their colleges and schools,
 That when nae real ills perplex them,
 They mak enow themsel's to vex them;
 And aye the less they hae to sturt them,
 In like proportion less will hurt them.

molest

A country fellow at the pleugh,
 His acre's tilled, he's right encugh;
 A country girl at her wheel,
 Her dizzen's done, she's unco weel:
 But Gentlemen, and Ladies warst,
 Wi' even-down want o' wark are curst.
 They loiter, lounging, lank, and lazy;
 Though deil haet ails them, yet uneasy;
 Their days insipid, dull, and tasteless;
 Their nights unquiet, lang, and restless.

And c'en their sports, their balls and races,
 Their galloping through public places,
 There's sic parade, sic pomp, and art,
 The joy can scarcely reach the heart.

The men cast out in party matches,
 Then sowther a' in deep debauches;
 Ae night they're mad wi' drink and w—ing,
 Niest day their life is past enduring.

The Ladies arm-in-arm in clusters,
 As great and gracious a' as sisters;
 But hear their absent thoughts o' ither,
 They're a' run deils and jads thegither.
 Whyles o'er the wee bit cup and platie,
 They sip the scandal potion pretty;
 Or lee-lang nights, wi' crabbit leuks,
 Pore owre the devil's pictured beuks;

Stake on a chanee a farmer's stackyard,
And cheat like ony unhanged blackguard.

There's some exception, man and woman;
But this is Gentry's life in common.

By this, the sun was out o' sight,
And darker gloaming brought the night:
The bum-cloek hummed wi' lazy drone;
The kye stood rowtin' i' the loan;
When up they gat, and shook their lugs,
Rejoiced they were na men, but dogs;
And each took aff his several way,
Resolved to meet some other day.

beetle

TO A LOUSE,

ON SEEING ONE ON A LADY'S BONNET AT CHURCH.¹

Ha! where ye gaun, ye crawlin' ferlie?
Your impudensee protects you sairly:
I canna say but ye strut rarely
Owre gauze and lace;
Though faith, I fear ye dine but sparsely
On sic a place.

wonder
strut

Ye ugly, creepin', blastit wonner,
Detested, shunned, by saunt and sinner,
How dare you set your fit upon her,
Sae fine a lady?
Gae somewhere else, and seek your dinner
On some poor body.

Swith, in some beggar's haffet squattle;
There ye may creep, and sprawl, and sprattle
Wi' other kindred, jumping cattle,
In shoals and nations;
Whare horn nor bane ne'er daur unsettle
Your thick plantations.

Now haud you there, ye're out o' sight,
Below the fatt'rels, snug and tight;
Na, faith ye yet! ye'll no be right
Till ye've got on it,
The very tapmost, towering height
O' Miss's bonnet.

ribbon-ends

¹ The 'lady' here referred to was merely a village belle: her name is mentioned at Mauchline; but the reader will acknowledge that it ought not to be recorded in print. The poem exhibits descriptive power, but most persons would probably have wished it not written, but for the last stanza, which has become proverbial.

I wad na been surprised to spy
You on an auld wife's flannen toy ;
Or aiblins some bit duddie boy,
 On 's wyliecoat ;
But Miss's fine Lunardi ! fie !¹
 How daur ye do 't ?

Oh, Jenny, dinna toss your head,
And set your beauties a' abroad !
Ye little ken what cursèd speed
The blastie's makin'!
Thae winks and finger-ends, I dread,
Are notice takin' !

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ousrel's as others see us !
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
 And foolish notion :
What airs in dress and gait wad lea'c us,
 And even devotion !

The Twa Herds had brought Burns into the friendship of John Goudie and others of the townsmen of Black John Russell, and he appears, before February 1786, to have paid several visits to Kilmarnock. A local work² relates an anecdote which may be generally, though not in every particular, true—that Goudie called one day on Burns at Mossgiel during harvest, and that Burns went out with him, and sitting down behind a *stook*, read to his visitor several of his poems. Goudie, delighted with what he heard, threw out hints of a desire to get the poems published, and invited the bard to visit him at Kilmarnock. There, it is said, Burns met at Goudie's table a group of the better class of people living in the town—the town-clerk Paterson, a Dr Hamilton, Major Parker, banker; Dr William Moore; and Mr Robert Muir, merchant. He appeared amongst these respectables in his simple

¹ Lunardi made several ascents in his balloon in Scotland in 1785, and gave rise to a kind of bonnet bearing his name.

2 The Contemporaries of Burns.

hidden gray, but doubtless astonished them by his wit and his verses. As visitors of Goudie, we cannot doubt that they were most of them partisans of the New Light. What immediately followed from the visit to Goudie we cannot tell: apparently, any wish that may have been formed either by the arch-heretic himself or any of his friends to get the poems published, did not come to any immediate effect.

At this time, by the death of a moderate clergyman named Mutrie, there was much excitement in Kilmarnock, it being uncertain whether the patron would appoint a moderate or a *high-flier* in his place. When it was learned that the appointment had been settled in favour of the Reverend James Mackinlay, a young scion of the zealous party, there was great joy throughout that camp. They remembered how a moderate—or, as Burns called it, a common-sense divinity—had come into their precincts twenty years before, with Mutrie's predecessor, Lindsay, and much they bewailed the effects of so long a predominance of error. But now this place was to be taken by one who might be expected to do much to repair the evil. The moderates were proportionately vexed. To console them as far as possible, Burns composed a poem containing an anticipatory view of the approaching ceremony, by which Mackinlay was to be introduced to his cure.¹

THE ORDINATION.

'For sense they little owe to frugal Heaven—
To please the mob, they hide the little given.'

Kilmarnock wabsters, fidge and claw,
And pour your creeshie nations;
And ye wha leather rax and draw,
O' a' denominations,²
Swith to the Laigh Kirk, ane an a',
And there tak up your stations;
Then aff to Begbie's³ in a raw,
And pour divine libations
For joy this day.

¹ The actual ordination of Mackinlay did not take place till the 6th April 1786.

² Kilmarnock was then a town of between three and four thousand inhabitants, most of whom were engaged in the manufacture of carpets, and other coarse woollen goods, or in the preparation of leather.

³ A tavern near the church.

Curst Common Sense, that imp o' h—,
 Cam in wi' Maggie Lauder;¹
 But Olyphant aft made her yell,
 And Russell sair misca'd her;²
 This day Mackinlay taks the flail,
 And he's the boy will blaud her!
 He'll clap a shangan on her tail,
 And set the bairns to daud her
 Wi' dirt this day.

slap
cleft stick
bespatter

Mak haste and turn King David owre,
 And lilt wi' holy clangor;
 O' double verse come gie us four,
 And skirl up the Bangor:
 This day the Kirk kicks up a stoure,
 Nae mair the knaves shall wrang her,
 For Heresy is in her power,
 And gloriously she'll whang her
 Wi' pith this day.

dust

Come, let a proper text be read,
 And touch it aff wi' vigour,
 How graceless Ham³ leugh at his dad,
 Which made Canaan a nigger;

¹ There was a popular notion that Mr Lindsay had been indebted for his presentation from the patron, Lord Glencairn, to his wife, Margaret Lauder, who was believed, but, I am assured, erroneously, to have been his lordship's housekeeper. Mr Lindsay's induction, in 1764, was so much in opposition to the sentiments of the people, that it produced a riot, attended by many outrages. Three young men, who had distinguished themselves by their violence, were whipped through Ayr, and imprisoned a month. These circumstances evoked from a shoemaker, named Hunter, a scoffing ballad, to which Burns alludes in his original note on this passage, and which may be found in the *History of Kilmarnock*, by Archibald M'Kay: 1848.

The violence of the people was so extreme at the attempted induction of Mr Lindsay, as to put an effectual stop to the proceedings of the presbytery. The clergy dispersed in terror. A whimsical anecdote connected with the affair was related by the late William Aiton of Hamilton:—The minister of Fenwick fled in trepidation, and, mounting his horse, proceeded to ride home, with the fearful scene still occupying his excited imagination. It happened that an English commercial traveller was at the same time leaving the town on his way to Glasgow. He asked the road, which was then somewhat difficult to find, and very bad when it was found. ‘Keep after that man for the first four miles, and ye cannot go wrong,’ said the people. The minister, finding a horseman following him very hard, thought it was an outraged Calvinist. He clapped the spurs to his beast, and flew faster than before. The Englishman, fearful to lose his way, put his horse to speed too, and then the affair became a John Gilpin scamper, only with two actors instead of one. At last the poor minister turned down a lane to one of his farmers, on whom he called in desperation to bring out his people and save his life. The Englishman, following close up, rode into the farmyard at the same moment, when, instead of a deadly combat on theological grounds, there took place only an explanation. The whole party enjoyed the joke so much, that the farmer insisted on keeping the stranger as his guest for the night, with the minister to help away the toddy.

² Olyphant and Russell were Kilmarnock ministers of the zealous party. ³ Genesis, ix. 22.

Or Phinehas¹ drove the murdering blade,
 With w— abhorring rigour ;
 Or Zipporah,² the scauldin' jad,
 Was like a bluidy tiger
 I' the inn that day.

There, try his mettle on the creed,
 And bind him down wi' caution,
 That stipend is a carnal weed
 He taks but for the fashion ;
 And gie him owre the flock to feed,
 And punish each transgression ;
 Especial, rams that cross the breed,
 Gie them sufficient threshin',
 Spare them nae day.

Now, auld Kilmarnock, cock thy tail,
 And toss thy horns fu' canty ;
 Nae mair thou'll rowte out-owre the dale,
 Because thy pasture's scanty ;
 For lapfu's large o' gospel kail
 Shall fill thy crib in plenty,
 And runts o' grace the pick and wale,
 No gien by way o' dainty,
 But ilka day.

merry
low

cabbage stems

Nae mair by Babel's streams we'll weep,
 To think upon our Zion ;
 And hing our fiddles up to sleep,
 Like baby-clouts a-dryin' :
 Come, screw the pegs, wi' tunefu' cheep,
 And o'er the thairms be tryin' ;
 Oh, rare ! to see our elbucks wheep,
 And a' like lamb-tails flyin'
 Fu' fast this day.

Lang, Patronage, wi' rod o' airn,
 Has shored the Kirk's undoin',
 As lately Fenwick, sair forfairn,
 Has proven to its ruin :³

iron
menaced
distressed¹ Numbers, xxv. 8.² Exodus, iv. 25.

³ Allusion is here made to the long-disputed settlement of Mr William Boyd as minister of the parish of Fenwick. The people being prejudiced against him as a moderate, or as one brought forward by that party, his nomination was combated as long as possible; but he was at length ordained in the council-chamber of Irvine, June 25, 1782. Mr Boyd afterwards became an acceptable pastor to his flock, over whom he presided till his death at an advanced age in 1828.

Our patron, honest man ! Gleneairn,
 He saw mischief was brewin',
 And like a godly cleet bairn
 He's waled us out a true ane,
 And sound this day.

Now, Robertson,¹ harangue nac mair,
 But steek your gab for ever ;
 Or try the wicked town of Ayr,
 For there they'll think you clever ;
 Or, nac reflection on your lear,
 Ye may commence a shaver ;
 Or to the Netherton² repair,
 And turn a carpet-weaver
 Aff-hand this day.

close—mouth

learning

Mutrie³ and you were just a match,
 We never had sic twa drones :
 Auld Hornie did the Laigh Kirk watch,
 Just like a wirkin' baudrons :
 And ayc he catched the tither wretch,
 To fry them in his caudrons :
 But now his honour maun detach,
 Wi' a his brimstone squadrons,
 Fast, fast this day.

cat

See, see auld Orthodoxy's faes
 She's swingein through the city :
 Hark how the nine-tailed cat she plays !
 I vow it's unco pretty :
 There Learning, with his Greekish face,
 Grunts out some Latin ditty,
 And Common Sense is gaun, she says,
 To mak to Jamie Beattie⁴
 Her plaint this day.

But there's Morality himsel'
 Embracing all opinions,
 Hear how he gies the tither yell,
 Between his twa companions ;

¹ The colleague of the newly-ordained clergyman—a moderate.

² A portion of the town of Kilmarnock.

³ The deceased clergyman whom Mr Mackinlay succeeded.

⁴ Probably the well-known author of the *Essay on Truth* is here meant. Local antiquaries are unable to give any other explanation.

See how she peels the skin and fell,
 As aye were peelin' onions !
 Now there—they're packèd aff to h—,
 And banished our dominions
 Henceforth this day.

Oh happy day ! rejoice, rejoice !
 Come house about the porter !
 Morality's demure decoys
 Shall here nac mair find quarter :
 Mackinlay, Russell, are the boys
 That heresy can torture :
 They'll gie her on a rape a hoyse,
 And cowe her measure shorter
 By th' head some day.

Come, bring the tither mutchkin in,
 And here's for a conclusion,
 To every New Light mother's son,
 From this time forth, Confusion :
 If mair they deave us wi' their din,
 Or Patronage intrusion,
 We'll light a spunk, and every skin
 We'll rin them aff in fusion,
 Like oil some day.¹

match

We venture, on conjecture, to refer to this period a poem containing some lines calculated to engrave themselves on the heart, but which did not see the light till after the fame of Burns was established :—

AN ADDRESS TO THE UNCO GUID, OR THE RIGIDLY RIGHTEOUS.

'My son, these maxims make a rule,
 And lump them aye thegither :
 The Rigid Righteous is a fool,
 The Rigid Wise anither.
 The cleanest corn that e'er was dight
 May ha'e some pyles o' caff in ;
 So ne'er a fellow-creature slight
 For random fits o' daffin.'

SOLOMON.—Eccles. vii. 16.

Oh ye wha are sac guid yoursel',
 Sac pious and sac holy,
 Ye've nought to do but mark and tell
 Your neebour's faults and folly !

¹ Mackinlay became a favourite preacher, very much, it is said, in consequence of his 'fine manner,' for he had little variety of illustration. He survived till 1841, attaining the patriarchal age of eighty-five years. A newspaper obituary notice informs us, that he was a native of the parish of Douglas, in Lanarkshire, and entered life as 'tutor' in the family of Sir William Cunningham of Windyhill, by whose influence with the Earl of Glencairn he obtained the presentation to the second charge of Kilmarnock.

Whase life is like a weel-gaun mill,
 Supplied wi' store o' water,
 The heaped happer's ebbing still,
 And still the clap plays clatter.

Hear me, ye venerable core,
 As counsel for poor mortals,
 That frequent pass douce Wisdom's door
 For glaikit Folly's portals ;
 I, for their thoughtless, careless sakes,
 Would here propone defences,
 Their donsie tricks, their black mistakes,
 Their failings and mischances.

Ye see your state wi' theirs compared,
 And shudder at the niffer,
 But cast a moment's fair regard,
 What maks the mighty differ ?
 Discount what scant occasion gave
 That purity ye pride in,
 And (what's aft mair than a' the lave)
 Your better art o' hiding.

Think, when your castigated pulse
 Gies now and then a wallop,
 What ragings must his veins convulse,
 That still eternal gallop ;
 Wi' wind and tide fair i' your tail,
 Right on ye scud your sea-way ;
 But in the teeth o' baith to sail,
 It makes an unco lee-way.

See Social Life and Glee sit down,
 All joyous and unthinking,
 Till, quite transmugrified, they're grown
 Debauchery and Drinking :
 Oh would they stay to calculate
 Th' eternal consequences ;
 Or your more dreaded hell to state,
 Damnation of expenses !

Ye high, exalted, virtuous dames,
 Tied up in godly laces,
 Before ye gie poor Frailty names,
 Suppose a change o' cases ;
 A dear-loved lad, convenience snug,
 A treacherous inclination—
 But, let me whisper i' your lug,
 Ye're aiblins nae temptation.

perhaps

Then gently scan your brother man,
 Still gentler sister woman ;
 Though they may gang a kennin' wrang, small matter
 To step aside is human :
 One point must still be greatly dark,
 The moving why they do it :
 And just as lamely can ye mark
 How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
 Decidedly can try us ;
 He knows each chord—its various tone,
 Each spring—its various bias :
 Then at the balance let's be mute,
 We never can adjust it ;
 What's done we partly may compute,
 But know not what's resisted.

The productions of this busy winter had not been confined to Burns's desk or table-drawer at Mossgiel. There were intelligent men around him, to whom he might communicate them, with a view to obtaining their opinion—his excellent patron Hamilton, his bosom friend clever little James Smith, his shrewd medical attendant Mackenzie, the Kilmarnock respectables afore-described, various clergymen, and, finally, Robert Aiken, perhaps the most sensible of all to the charms of divine poesy. This Mr Aiken, to whom Burns has given the immortality of a dedication of his *Cotter's Saturday Night*, was a legal practitioner—Scottice, writer—and also a surveyor of taxes, in the town of Ayr. Such was his external position in life: the internal man presents us with warm affections, a cultivated mind, and a power of eloquence most extraordinary for his place and time. We have seen Holy Willie adverting to the effects of his harangue in the case of Gavin Hamilton before the Ayr presbytery. It was, however, when he poured forth the sentiments of a warm and affectionate heart, that Aiken exercised his highest power. His feelings were like those of Burns himself. As an example: some years after the death of Burns, a gentleman, walking out with Mr Aiken to celebrate the 25th of January at Alloway Kirk, produced an ode to the memory of the poet, which he had composed for the occasion. Aiken read a few verses, and walked on in advance without speaking. At last he said in a faltering tone: 'That will do. There are two criteria by which I judge of the merits of a production of this kind—first, my eyes are suffused; next, the buttons

of my waistcoat *skelp*?' His vest had actually, like Andrew Lammie's in the old ballad, burst open! He once had occasion, at a large party, to make a speech in answer to a toast, his uncle, the Rev. Dr Dalrymple, being also present. He addressed his venerable relative in such moving terms as to draw tears from every eye. An Irish officer who was present caught the infection, wiped his cheeks, and looking round the company, said: 'Now, can anybody tell me what is the *maning* of all this?' Such was the man whose notice Burns had now attracted. Can we wonder that two such men should have speedily become much attached to each other, all disparity of worldly condition notwithstanding. Burns committed many of his poems to the care of Mr Aiken, and Aiken read them to all whom he thought likely to appreciate them, giving them the benefit of a style of elocution which is allowed to have been of wonderful effect. Burns himself says: 'Mr Aiken read me into fame.' Thus we see, that even before he had published his poems, he could not be considered as 'a bard of no regard' in at least his native district. It was with perfect truth that he made Coila say in *The Vision*—

————— now, o'er all my wide domains
Thy fame extends,
And some, the pride of Coila's plains,
Become thy friends.

We have a glimpse of Burns's situation and his doings in February 1786 in a letter

TO MR JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.¹

MOSSGIEL, February 17, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR—I have not time at present to upbraid you for your silence and neglect; I shall only say I received yours with great pleasure. I have enclosed you a piece of rhyming-ware for your perusal. I have been very busy with the Muses since I saw you, and have composed, among several others, *The Ordination*, a poem on Mr M'Kinlay's being called to Kilmarnock; *Scotch Drink*, a poem; *The Cotter's Saturday Night*; *An Address to the Devil*, &c. I have likewise completed my poem on the *Dogs*, but have not shewn it to the world. My chief patron now is Mr Aiken in Ayr, who is pleased to express great approbation of my works. Be so good as send me Fergusson, by Connel, and I will remit you the money. I have no news to acquaint you with about Mauchline; they are just going on in the old way. I have some very important news with respect to myself, not the most agreeable—news that I

¹ Richmond had gone to the capital in November, to pursue his legal studies in a writer's office there.

am sure you cannot guess, but I shall give you the particulars another time. I am extremely happy with Smith; he is the only friend I have now in Mauchline. I can scarcely forgive your long neglect of me, and I beg you will let me hear from you regularly by Connell. If you would act your part as a friend, I am sure neither good nor bad fortune should strange or alter me. Excuse haste, as I got yours but yesterday. I am, my dear sir, yours,

ROBERT BURNES.

THE INVENTORY.

IN ANSWER TO A MANDATE BY THE SURVEYOR OF THE TAXES.¹

Sir, as your mandate did request,
I send you here a faithfu' list
O' gudes and gear, and a' my graith,
To which I'm clear to gie my aith.

Imprimis, then, for carriage-cattle,
I have four brutes o' gallant mettle,
As ever drew afore a pettle.
My han' afore 's² a gude auld has-been,
Aud wight and wilfu' a' his days been,
My han' ahin 's³ a weel-gaun filly,
That aft has borne me hame frac Killic,⁴
And your auld burro' monie a time,
In days when riding was nae crime—
But ance, whan in my wooing pride,
I like a blockhead boost to ride,
The wilfu' creature sae I pat to
(L—, pardon all my sins, and that too !)
I played my filly sic a shavie,
She 's a' bedevil'd wi' the spavic.
My fur ahin 's⁵ a wordy beast,
As e'er in tug or tow was trac'd.
The fourth's a Highland Donald hastie,
A d—d red wud Kilburnie blastic!⁶

plough-stick

worthy

¹ In May 1785, in order to liquidate ten millions of unfunded debt, Mr Pitt made a considerable addition to the number of taxed articles, amongst which were female-servants. The poem seems to have been called forth by the bard's receipt of the next annual mandate from Mr Aiken of Ayr, surveyor of taxes for the district.

² The fore-horse on the left hand in the plough.

³ The hindmost on the left hand in the plough.

⁴ Kilmarnock.

⁵ The hindmost horse on the right hand in the plough.

⁶ Burns had bought this horse at a Kilburnie fair, from one William Kirkwood, a noted horse-dealer, who lived at Baillieston in that neighbourhood, and who realised a fortune by his trade.—*Correspondent.*

Forbye a cowte o' cowtes the wale,
 As ever ran afore a tail,
 If he be spared to be a beast,
 He'll draw me fifteen pun' at least—
 Wheel-carriages I hae but few,
 Threec carts, and twa are feckly new ;
 Ae auld wheelbarrow, mair for token
 Ac leg and baith the trams are broken ;
 I made a poker o' the spin'le,
 And my auld mither brunt the trin'le.

colt—choice

mostly

wheel

For men I 've three mischievous boys,
 Run deils for rantin' and for noise ;
 A gaudsman ane, a thrasher t'other,
 Wee Davock hauds the nowt in fother.
 I rule them, as I ought, disrecreetly,
 And aften labour them completely ;
 And aye on Sundays duly, nightly,
 I on the Questions targe them tightly ;
 Till, faith, wee Davock's turned sac gleg,
 Though scarcely langer than your leg,
 He'll screed you aff Effectual Calling,¹
 As fast as ony in the dwalling.
 I've nane in female servin' station
 (L— keep me aye frae a' temptation !)
 I hae nae wife—and that my bliss is,
 And ye have laid nae tax on misses.
 Wi' weans I 'm mair than weel contented,
 Heaven sent me ane mae than I wanted.
 My sonsic, smirking, dear-bought Bess,²
 She stares the daddy in her face,
 Enough of ought ye like but grace ;
 But her, my bonny sweet wee lady,
 I 've paid enough for her already,
 And gin ye tax her or her mither,
 B' the L— ! ye'se get them a' thegither.

And now, remember, Mr Aiken,
 Nae kind of licence out I 'm takin' ; * * *
 My travel a' on foot I 'll shank it,
 I 've sturdy bearers, Gude be thankit. * * *
 Sae dinna put me in your buke,
 Nor for my ten white shillings luke.

¹ In the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly of Divines—universally used in Scotland, and commonly called *The Questions*—*What is Effectual Calling?* is one of the interrogations.

² The poet's child, then an inmate of Mossiel, and about fifteen months old.

This list wi' my ain hand I 've wrote it,
The day and date as under noted;
Then know all ye whom it concerns,
Subscriptio huic. ROBERT

ROBERT BURNS.

MOSGIEL, February 22, 1786.

The letter which follows was the consequence of a request for a sight of his *Cotter's Saturday Night*, from a person named John Kennedy, who then resided as clerk or sub-factor at Dumfries House, the seat of the Earl of Dumfries, a few miles from Mauchline.¹ It is characteristic of the frankness of Burns, and expresses some of his predominant feelings:—

TO MR JOHN KENNEDY.

MOSSGIEL, 3d March 1786.

SIR—I have done myself the pleasure of complying with your request in sending you my Cottager. If you have a leisure minute, I should be glad you would copy it, and return me either the original or the transcript, as I have not a copy of it by me, and I have a friend who wishes to see it.

Now, Kennedy, if foot or horse
E'er bring you in by Mauchline Corse,²
L—, man, there's lasses there wad force
 A hermit's fancy;
And down the gate, in faith, they're worse,
 And mair unchancy.

But, as I'm sayin', please step to Dow's,
And taste sic gear as Johnnie brews,
Till some bit callan bring me news
That you are there;
And if we dinna haud a bouze,
I'se ne'er drink mair.

It's no I like to sit and swallow,
Then like a swine to puke and wallow;
But gie me just a true guid fallow,
 Wi' right engine
And spunkie, ance to make us mellow,
 And then we'll shine.

Now, if ye're ane o' warld's folk,
Wha rate the wearer by the cloak,

¹ Mr Kennedy was subsequently employed as factor by the Marquis of Breadalbane.

² The market-cross of the village.

And sklent on poverty their joke,
Wi' bitter sneer,
Wi' you no friendship will I troke,
Nor cheap nor dear.

glance
exchange

But if, as I 'm informèd weel,
Ye hate, as ill's the very deil,
The flinty heart that canna feel,
Come, sir, here's tae you !
Hae, there's my han', I wiss you weel,
And guid be wi' you !

R. B.

TO MR ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

MOSSGIEL, 20th March 1786.

DEAR SIR—I am heartily sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing you as you returned through Mauchline; but as I was engaged, I could not be in town before the evening.

I here enclose you my *Scotch Drink*, and 'may the —— follow with a blessing for your edification.' I hope, some time before we hear the gowk,¹ to have the pleasure of seeing you at Kilmarnock, when I intend we shall have a gill between us in a mutchkin-stoup, which will be a great comfort and consolation to, dear sir, your humble servant,

ROBERT BURNES.

We now approach a most painful chapter in the poet's history. It may be best to break ground by presenting the remainder of his autobiographical narrative :—

'I now began,' he says, 'to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my *Holy Fair*. I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. *Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest

¹ The cuckoo.

metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, *The Lament*. This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart and mistaken the reckoning of rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother—in truth, it was only nominally mine—and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power: I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver; or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable climate, and gone to the world of spirits. I can truly say that, *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves. To know myself had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone—I balanced myself with others—I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet—I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides, I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas—the price of wafting me to the torrid zone—I took a steerage-passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde; for

“Hungry ruin had me in the wind.”

‘I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia

—*The Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast*—when a letter from Dr Blacklock to a friend of mine overthrew all my schemes by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion, that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men—the Earl of Glencairn. *Oublie moi, Grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!*

'I need relate no further. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to *catch* the characters and *the manners living as they rise*. Whether I have profited, time will shew.' . . .

The commencement of Burns's acquaintance with his Jean has been already touched upon. This young woman had now been for upwards of a year the goddess of his idolatry. He had, rather oddly, written no songs which can be certainly traced as in her honour; but he had expressed his admiration of her in his *Epistle to Davie*, in the *Address to the Deil*, and *The Vision*. When it appeared, in the spring of 1786, that love had become transgression, Burns and his brother were beginning to fear that their farm would prove a ruinous concern. He yielded, nevertheless, to the wish of his unhappy partner to acknowledge her as his wife, and thus repair as far as possible the consequences of their error. He gave her such an acknowledgment in writing—a document sufficient in the law of Scotland to constitute what is called an irregular, though perfectly valid, marriage. Jean probably expected that, if her parents were first made acquainted with her fault by the announcement of clandestine nuptials, they would look more mildly upon it; for such is a common course of circumstances in her rank in life in Scotland. But it was otherwise in this case. Knowing well that Burns was not in flourishing circumstances, it appeared to the father that marriage, so far from mending the matter, made it worse.

Burns came forward on this occasion with all the manliness which his character would have led us to expect. He admitted the hopelessness of his present circumstances; but he offered to

go out to Jamaica in the hope of bettering them, and of coming home in a few years and claiming Jean as his wife. If this plan should not meet Mr Armour's approbation, he was willing to descend even to the condition of a common labourer, in order to furnish means for the present support of his wife and her expected offspring. It does not seem to have been one of his hopes that the wondrous poems lying in the table-drawer at Mossiel could help in aught to lighten the burden he was willing to incur. Mr Armour met every proposal with rejection. The course he took will only be intelligible if we reflect that in Scottish village-life there is little of the delicacy as to female purity which prevails in more refined circles. Armour reflected that his daughter, if free from her connection with the ill-starred poet, might yet hope for a comfortable settlement in life. He therefore announced his resolution, if possible, to annul the marriage, such as it was. Yielding to his demand, probably preferred in no mild mood, Jean surrendered the paper to her angry father, by whom it was placed in the hands of Mr Aiken of Ayr. There were some violent and distressing scenes between the parties. Not endowed by nature with very deep or abiding feelings, and depressed in spirit by the sense of her error, Jean, to the utter confusion of Burns, appeared less willing to cleave to her husband than to her father. The poet viewed her conduct with deep resentment, and was thrown by it into a state of mind which, according to his own confession, 'had very nearly given him one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart and mistaken the reckoning of rationality.'

He instantly made up his mind to exile from his much-loved country. His poverty and imprudence made that course desirable; and after the mortification he had met with, he had no longer the wish to stay at home. He therefore agreed with a Dr Douglas to go out to Jamaica as a book-keeper on his estate. To raise money for his passage, Mr Hamilton advised him to publish his poems by subscription, believing that his name had already secured him a sufficient number of friends to make the sale of a small volume certain, and to a moderate extent profitable. We have seen, from many expressions in the poems of the past winter, that Burns was in a state of mind regarding them to make this plan highly acceptable to him. Accordingly, without any loss of time, proposals or subscription-papers were thrown off and circulated amongst the friends of the unfortunate bard.

There are a few letters appropriate to this period, and several poems, which do more than anything else could to illustrate the state of their author's mind.

TO MR AIKEN.

MOSSGIEL, 3d April 1786.

DEAR SIR—I received your kind letter with double pleasure, on account of the second flattering instance of Mrs C.'s notice and approbation. I assure you I

'Turn out the brunt side o' my shin,'

as the famous Ramsay, of jingling memory, says, at such a patroness. Present her my most grateful acknowledgments, in your very best manner of telling truth. I have inscribed the following stanza on the blank-leaf of Miss More's works :—

Thou flattering mark of friendship kind,
Still may thy pages call to mind
The dear, the beauteous Donor :
Though sweetly female every part,
Yet such a head, and more the heart,
Does both the sexes honour.
She shewed her taste refined and just
When she selected thee,
Yet deviating own I must,
In sae approving me ;
But kind still, I'll mind still
The Giver in the gift—
I'll bless her, and wiss her
A friend aboon the lift.

My proposals for publishing I am just going to send to the press. I expect to hear from you by the first opportunity. I am ever, dear sir, yours,

ROBERT BURNES.

TO [JOHN BALLANTYNE, ESQ., AYR?]

[Between 3d and 17th April 1786?]

HONOURED SIR—My proposals came to hand last night, and knowing that you would wish to have it in your power to do me a service as early as anybody, I enclose you half a sheet of them. I must consult you, first opportunity, on the propriety of sending my quondam friend, Mr Aiken, a copy. If he is now reconciled to my character as an honest man, I would do it with all my soul; but I would not be beholden to the noblest being ever God created, if he imagined me to be a rascal. Apropos, old Mr Armour prevailed with him to mutilate that unlucky paper yesterday.

Would you believe it?—though I had not a hope, nor even a wish, to make her mine after her conduct, yet, when he told me the names were all out of the paper, my heart died within me, and he cut my veins with the news. * * * R. B.

At this particular crisis the poet changed the spelling of his name from Burness, as his father had written it, to the orthography common in Ayrshire.

TO MR M'WHINNIE, WRITER, AYR.

MOSSGIEL, 17th April 1786.

It is injuring some hearts, those hearts that elegantly bear the impression of the good Creator, to say to them you give them the trouble of obliging a friend; for this reason, I only tell you that I gratify my own feelings in requesting your friendly offices with respect to the enclosed,¹ because I know it will gratify yours to assist me in it to the utmost of your power.

I have sent you four copies, as I have no less than eight dozen, which is a great deal more than I shall ever need.

Be sure to remember a poor poet militant in your prayers. He looks forward with fear and trembling to that, to him, important moment which stamps the die with—with—with, perhaps, the eternal disgrace of, my dear sir, your humble, afflicted, tormented,

ROBERT BURNS.

TO MR JOHN KENNEDY.

MOSSGIEL, 20th April 1786.

SIR—By some neglect in Mr Hamilton, I did not hear of your kind request for a subscription-paper till this day. I will not attempt any acknowledgment for this, nor the manner in which I see your name in Mr Hamilton's subscription-list. Allow me only to say, sir, I feel the weight of the debt.

I have here likewise enclosed a small piece, the very latest of my productions. I am a good deal pleased with some sentiments myself, as they are just the native querulous feelings of a heart which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, ‘mclancholy has marked for her own.’

Our race comes on apace—that much expected scene of revelry and mirth; but to me it brings no joy equal to that meeting with which you last flattered the expectation of, sir, your indebted humble servant,

R. B.

The following is the piece above alluded to. In the copy sent

¹ A prospectus of the poems.

to Mr Kennedy, it is entitled *The Gowan*; the English appellation was subsequently adopted:—

TO A MOUNTAIN DAISY,

ON TURNING ONE DOWN WITH THE PLOUGH IN APRIL 1786.¹

Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flower,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem:
To spare thee now is past my power,
 Thou bonny gem.

Alas! it's no thy neibor sweet,
The bonny lark, companion meet,
Bending thee 'mang the dewy weet!
 Wi' speckled breast,
When upward-springing, blithe, to greet
 The purpling east.

Cauld blew the bitter biting north
Upon thy early, humble birth;
Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
 Amid the storm,
Scarce reared above the parent earth
 Thy tender form.

glanced

The flaunting flowers our gardens yield,
High sheltering woods and wa's maun shield:
But thou, beneath the random bield
 O' clod or stane,
Adorns the histie stibble-field,
 Unseen, alanc.

protection

dry

There, in thy seanty mantle clad,
Thy snawie bosom sunward spread,
Thou lifts thy unassuming head
 In humble guise;
But now the share uptears thy bed,
 And low thou lies!

Such is the fate of artless maid,
Sweet floweret of the rural shade!

¹ ‘The address *To a Mountain Daisy turned down with the Plough* is of the same nature with the address *To a Mouse*, but inferior in point of originality, as well as in the interest produced. To extract out of a train of incidents so common and seemingly so trivial as these, so fine a train of sentiment and imagery, is the surest proof, as well as the most brilliant triumph, of original genius.’—CURRIE.

By love's simplicity betrayed,
And guileless trust,
Till she, like thee, all soiled, is laid
Low i' the dust.

Such is the fate of simple bard,
On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd !
Unskilful he to note the card
Of prudent lore,
Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,
And whelm him o'er !

Such fate to suffering worth is given,
Who long with wants and woes has striven,
By human pride or cunning driven
To misery's brink,
Till wrenched of every stay but Heaven,
He, ruined, sink !

Even thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
That fate is thine—no distant date ;
Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives, elate,
Full on thy bloom,
Till crushed beneath the furrow's weight,
Shall be thy doom.

L A M E N T,

OCCASIONED BY THE UNFORTUNATE ISSUE OF A FRIEND'S AMOUR.

' Alas ! how oft does goodness wound itself,
And sweet affection prove the spring of wo ! '—HOME.

Oh thou pale orb, that silent shines,
While care-untroubled mortals sleep !
Thou seest a wretch who only pines,
And wanders here to wail and weep !
With wo I nightly vigils keep
Beneath thy wan, unwarming beam ;
And mourn, in lamentation deep,
How life and love are all a dream.

I joyless view thy rays adorn
The faintly-marked distant hill :
I joyless view thy trembling horn
Reflected in the gurgling rill :
My fondly-fluttering heart be still !
Thou busy power, remembrance, cease !
Ah ! must the agonising thrill
For ever bar returning peace !

No idly-feigned poetic pains
 My sad, love-lorn lamentings claim ;
 No shepherd's pipe—Arcadian strains ;
 No fabled tortures, quaint and tame :
 The plighted faith ; the mutual flame ;
 The oft-attested Powers above ;
 The promised father's tender name ;
 These were the pledges of my love !

Encircled in her clasping arms,
 How have the raptured moments flown !
 How have I wished for fortune's charms
 For her dear sake, and hers alone !
 And must I think it !—is she gone,
 My secret heart's exulting boast ?
 And does she heedless hear my groan ?
 And is she ever, ever lost ?

Oh can she bear so base a heart,
 So lost to honour, lost to truth,
 As from the fondest lover part,
 The plighted husband of her youth !
 Alas ! life's path may be unsmooth !
 Her way may lie through rough distress !
 Then who her pangs and pains will soothe,
 Her sorrows share, and make them less ?

Ye wingèd hours that o'er us passed,
 Enraptured more, the more enjoyed,
 Your dear remembrance in my breast,
 My fondly-treasured thoughts employed.
 That breast, how dreary now, and void,
 For her too scanty once of room !
 Even every ray of hope destroyed,
 And not a wish to gild the gloom !

The morn that warns th' approaching day,
 Awakes me up to toil and wo :
 I see the hours in long array,
 That I must suffer, lingering, slow.
 Full many a pang, and many a throe,
 Keen recollection's direful train,
 Must wring my soul ere Phœbus, low,
 Shall kiss the distant western main.

And when my nightly couch I try,
 Sore harassed out with care and grief,
 My toil-beat nerves, and tear-worn eye
 Keep watchings with the nightly thief :

Or if I slumber, fancy, chief,
 Reigns haggard-wild in sore affright :
 Even day, all bitter, brings relief
 From such a horror-breathing night.

Oh thou bright queen, who o'er th' expanse,
 Now highest reign'st, with boundless sway !
 Oft has thy silent-marking glance
 Observed us, fondly-wandering, stray !
 The time, unheeded, sped away,
 While love's luxurious pulse beat high,
 Beneath thy silver-gleaming ray,
 To mark the mutual kindling eye.

Oh scenes in strong remembrance set !
 Scenes never, never to return !
 Scenes, if in stupor I forget,
 Again I feel, again I burn !
 From every joy and pleasure torn,
 Life's weary vale I 'll wander through ;
 And hopeless, comfortless, I 'll mourn
 A faithless woman's broken vow.

DESPONDENCY:

A N O D E.

Oppressed with grief, oppressed with care,
 A burden more than I can bear,
 I set me down and sigh :
 Oh life ! thou art a galling load,
 Along a rough, a weary road,
 To wretches such as I !
 Dim-backward as I cast my view,
 What sickening scenes appear !
 What sorrows yet may pierce me through,
 Too justly I may fear !
 Still caring, despairing,
 Must be my bitter doom ;
 My woes here shall close ne'er
 But with the closing tomb !

Happy, ye sons of busy life,
 Who, equal to the bustling strife,
 No other view regard !
 Even when the wishèd end's denied,
 Yet while the busy means are plied,
 They bring their own reward :

Whilst I, a hope-abandoned wight,
 Unfitted with an aim,
 Meet every sad returning night
 And joyless morn the same ;
 You, bustling, and justling,
 Forget each grief and pain ;
 I, listless, yet restless,
 Find every prospect vain.

How blest the solitary's lot,
 Who, all-forgetting, all-forgot,
 Within his humble cell,
 The cavern wild with tangling roots,
 Sits o'er his newly-gathered fruits,
 Beside his crystal well !
 Or haply to his evening thought,
 By unfrequented stream,
 The ways of men are distant brought,
 A faint collected dream ;
 While praising, and raising
 His thoughts to Heaven on high,
 As wand'ring, meand'ring,
 He views the solemn sky.

Than I, no lonely hermit placed,
 Where never human footstep traced,
 Less fit to play the part ;
 The lucky moment to improve,
 And just to stop, and just to move,
 With self-respecting art.
 But ah ! those pleasures, loves, and joys,
 Which I too keenly taste,
 The solitary can despise,
 Can want, and yet be blest !
 He needs not, he heeds not,
 Or human love or hate,
 Whilst I here, must cry here
 At perfidy ingrate !

Oh enviable, early days,
 When dancing thoughtless pleasure's maze,
 To care, to guilt unknown !
 How ill exchanged for riper times,
 To feel the follies, or the crimes,
 Of others, or my own !
 Ye tiny elves that guiltless sport,
 Like linnets in the bush,
 Ye little know the ills ye court,
 When manhood is your wish !

The losses, the crosses,
 That active man engage !
 The fears all, the tears all,
 Of dim declining age.

TO RUIN.

All hail ! inexorable lord !
 At whose destruction-breathing word
 The mightiest empires fall !
 Thy cruel, wo-delighted train,
 The ministers of grief and pain,
 A sullen weleome, all !
 With stern-resolved, despairing eye,
 I see each aimèd dart ;
 For one has cut my dearest tie,
 And quivers in my heart.
 Then lowering and pouring,
 The storm no more I dread ;
 Though thick'ning and black'ning
 Round my devoted head.

And thou grim Power, by life abhorred,
 While life a pleasure can afford,
 Oh hear a wretch's prayer !
 No more I shrink appalled, afraid ;
 I court, I beg thy friendly aid,
 To close this scene of care !
 When shall my soul, in silent peace,
 Resign life's joyless day ;
 My weary heart its throbings cease,
 Cold mouldering in the clay ?
 No fear more, no tear more,
 To stain my lifeless face ;
 Enclasped and graspèd
 Within thy cold embrace !

S O N G.

Again rejoicing Nature sees
 Her robe assume its vernal hues ;
 Her leafy locks wave in the breeze,
 All freshly steeped in morning dews.¹

In vain to me the cowslips blaw,
 In vain to me the violets spring ;
 In vain to me, in glen or shaw,
 The mavis and the lintwhite sing.

The merry ploughboy cheers his team,
 Wi' joy the tentie seedsmen stalks ;
 But life to me's a weary dream,
 A dream of ane that never wauks.

The wanton coot the water skims,
 Amang the reeds the ducklings cry,
 The stately swan majestic swims,
 And everything is blest but I.

The shepherd steeks his faulding slap,
 And owre the moorland whistles shrill ;
 Wi' wild, unequal, wandering step,
 I meet him on the dewy hill.

And when the lark, 'tween light and dark,
 Blithe waukens by the daisy's side,
 And mounts and sings on flittering wings,
 A woe-worn ghaist I hameward glide.²

Come, Winter, with thine angry howl,
 And raging bend the naked tree :
 Thy gloom will soothe my cheerless soul,
 When Nature all is sad like me !

The wretchedness breathed in these poems is of too extreme a character to have been long predominant, at least in all its force, in such a mind as that of Burns. At the beginning of May, he is found addressing Mr Hamilton in playful terms respecting a

¹ Burns, on publishing this song in his first Edinburgh edition, 1787, admitted into it a chorus from a song written by a gentleman of that city :

' And maun I still on Menie doat,
 And bear the scorn that's in her e'e,
 For it's jet jet black, and it's like a hawk,
 And it winna let a body be ! '

This doggrel interferes so sadly with the strain of Burns's beautiful ode, that the present editor felt compelled to extrude it. He hopes it will never hereafter be replaeed.

² The resemblance of this verse to a passage in the *Mountain Daisy* will be observed.

servant-boy, whom that gentleman had talked of taking off his hands, and who in the meantime had been spoken to with a view to engagement by a person whom Burns did not so much esteem :

NOTE TO GAVIN HAMILTON.

MOSGAVILLE,¹ May 3, 1786.

I hold it, sir, my bounden duty,
To warn you how that Master Tootie,
 Alias, Laird M'Gaum,
Was here to hire yon lad away
'Bout whom ye spak the tither day,
 And wad hae done 't aff han' :
But lest he learn the callan tricks,
 As, faith, I muckle doubt him,
Like serapin' out auld Crummie's nicks,²
 And tellin' lies about them ;
 As lieve then, I'd have then,
 Your clerkship he should sair,
If sae be ye may be
 Not fitted other where.

Although I say 't, he's gleg enough,
And 'bout a house that's rude and rough,
 The boy might learn to swear ;
But then wi' you he'll be sae taught,
And get sic fair example straught,
 I havena ony fear.
Ye'll catechise him every quirk,
 And shore him weel wi' h—,
And gar him follow to the kirk—
 Aye when ye gang yoursel'.
 If ye, then, maun be, then,
 Frae hame this comin' Friday ;
 Then please, sir, to lea'e, sir,
 The orders wi' your leddy.

My word of honour I hae gien,
In Paisley John's, that night at e'en,
 To meet the warld's worm ;³
To try to get the twa to gree,
And name the airles⁴ and the fee,
 In legal mode and form :

¹ Mossgavel is the proper appellation of the farm—shortened into Mossgiel.

² Tootie lived in Mauchline, and dealt in cows. The age of these animals is marked by rings on their horns, which may of course be cut and polished off, so as to cause the cow to appear younger than it is.

³ A term expressive of a mean, avaricious character.

⁴ The airles—earnest-money.

I ken he weel a sneck can draw,¹
 When simple bodies let him ;
 And if a devil be at a',
 In faith he's sure to get him.
 To phrase you, and praise you,
 Ye ken your Laureate scorns :
 The prayer still, you share still,
 Of grateful MINSTREL BURNS.

In this month, also, he addressed a poetical letter of sagacious advice to Andrew Aiken,² son of his patron Robert Aiken, then about to launch out into the world :—

EPISTLE TO A YOUNG FRIEND.

May 1786.

I lang hae thought, my youthfu' friend,
 A something to have sent you,
 Though it should serve nae other end
 Than just a kind memento ;
 But how the subject-theme may gang,
 Let time and chance determine ;
 Perhaps it may turn out a sang,
 Perhaps turn out a sermon.

Ye 'll try the world fu' soon, my lad,
 And, Andrew dear, believe me,
 Ye 'll find mankind an unco squad,
 And muckle they may grieve ye :
 For care and trouble set your thought,
 Even when your end 's attained ;
 And a' your views may come to nought,
 Where every nerve is strained.

I 'll no say men are villains a' ;
 The real, hardened wicked,
 Wha hae nae check but human law,
 Are to a few restricked ;
 But, och ! mankind are unco weak,
 And little to be trusted ;
 If self the wavering balance shake,
 It 's rarely right adjusted !

¹ See note to the *Address to the Deil*, p. 169.

² Andrew Aiken entered commercial life at Liverpool, and prospered. He died in 1831 at Riga, where he held the office of English consul. The late Mr Niven of Kilbride—the ‘Willie’ of the Kirkoswald anecdotes—always alleged that Burns originally addressed this epistle to him.

Yet they wha fa' in fortune's strife,
 Their fate we should na censure,
 For still th' important end of life
 They equally may answer ;
 A man may hae an honest heart,
 Though poortith hourly stare him ;
 A man may tak a neibor's part,
 Yet hae nac cash to spare him.

poverty

Aye free, aff han' your story tell,
 When wi' a bosom crony ;
 But still keep something to yoursel'
 Ye scarcely tell to ony.
 Conceal yoursel' as weel's ye can
 Frac critical dissection,
 But keek through every other man
 Wi' sharpened, sly inspection.¹

look

The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love,
 Luxuriantly indulge it ;
 But never tempt th' illicit rove,
 Though naething should divulge it :
 I waive the quantum o' the sin,
 The hazard of concealing ;
 But, och ! it hardens a' within,
 And petrifies the feeling !

flame

To catch Dame Fortune's golden smile,
 Assiduous wait upon her ;
 And gather gear by every wile
 That's justified by honour ;
 Not for to hide it in a hedge,
 Nor for a train-attendant,
 But for the glorious privilege
 Of being independent.

The fear o' hell 's a hangman's whip,
 To haul the wretch in order ;
 But where ye feel your honour grip,
 Let that aye be your border :
 Its slightest touches, instant pause—
 Debar a' side-pretences ;
 And resolutely keep its laws,
 Uncaring consequences.

¹ It is not often that the sagacity of Burns is open to challenge ; but here certainly he is not philosophically right. It must always be a questionable maxim which proposes to benefit the individual at the expense of his fellow-creatures, or which, if generally followed, would neutralise itself—as this would do. Let all men rather be open, and let all men be unsuspicous, to the utmost degree that a prudent regard to circumstances will allow.

The great Creator to revere
Must sure become the creature;
But still the preaching cant forbear,
And even the rigid feature:
Yet ne'er with wits profane to range,
Be complaisance extended;
An Atheist laugh's a poor exchange
For Deity offended!

When ranting round in Pleasure's ring,
Religion may be blinded ;
Or if she gie a random sting,
It may be little minded ;
But when on life we're tempest-driven,
A conscience but a canker,
A correspondence fixed wi' Heaven,
Is sure a noble anchor !

Adieu, dear amiable youth !
Your heart can ne'er be wanting !
May prudence, fortitude, and truth,
Erect your brow undaunting !
In ploughman phrase, 'God send you speed,'
Still daily to grow wiser ;
And may you better reek the rede
Than ever did th' adviser !

In a copy of this poem in Burns's own hand, and bearing date 'Mossgiel, May 15th, 1786,' there occurs an additional stanza which the admirable taste of the poet had doubtless observed to be below the rest in terseness and point, and which he had therefore seen fit to omit. It throws so valuable a light on the state of his own mind at this crisis, that it certainly ought not to be suppressed, though we should not desire to see it replaeed in the poem. It oceurs immediately after the line, 'And petrifies the feeling.'

If ye hae made a step aside,
Some hap mistake o'erta'en you,
Yet still keep up a decent pride,
And ne'er o'er far demean you :
Time comes wi' kind oblivious shade,
And daily darker sets it,
And if nae mair mistakes are made,
The world soon forgets it.¹

¹ The copy of the poem above alluded to is in the possession of Mr George Johnston, broker, Liverpool.

This month, however, appears to have witnessed a much more wonderful aberration from the forlorn state indicated in the *Lament*. The heart of man is full of mystery. Sometimes when it appears most keenly set upon one passion, it is at the nearest point to turning into some wholly different channel. Its reactions from wounded affection are amongst its most surprising transitions. Burns had been cast off by the Armours in what he felt as a most shameful way—divorced on account of poverty! In this moment of wounded pride he recalled the image of an amiable girl in the service of his friend Hamilton, a sweet, sprightly, blue-eyed creature, of a firmer modesty and self-respect than too many of the other maidens he had addressed. Mary Campbell was of Highland parentage, from the neighbourhood of Dunoon, on the Firth of Clyde. Her father was a sailor in a revenue-cutter, the station of which being at Campbelton, in Kintyre, his family now resided there. We may presume that the young woman was somewhat superior in cast of mind, manners, and intelligence to her situation, as it is ascertained that she had spent some of her youthful years in the family of the Rev. David Campbell of Loch Ranza, in Arran, a relation of her mother. She had afterwards been induced by another relative, a Mrs Isabella Campbell, who was house-keeper to a family in Ayrshire, to come to that county and take a situation as a servant. There is some obscurity about the situations and movements of Mary: it is quite certain that she was at one time dairy-maid at Coilsfield, and the surviving children of Mr Hamilton are probably right in thinking that she was nurse-maid to their deceased brother Alexander, who was born in July 1785, and that she saw him through some of the early stages of infancy before leaving their house. As a stranger serving only for a short time in the village, she has been little remembered there. Mrs Begg recollects no sort of reference to her at Mossgiel, except from the poet himself, when he told John Blane one day that ‘Mary had refused to meet him in the old castle’—the dismantled tower of the priory near Mr Hamilton’s house.

A song of Burns, in persons, scenery, and circumstances most sweetly pastoral, and breathing of luxurious love unsmirched by disappointment actual or anticipated, must here be introduced, because it undoubtedly relates to his passion for Mary. It may be remarked, that the locality, Glen Afton, which is at a considerable distance, in the head of Nithsdale, has led to some misapprehensions regarding the history of the lyric; but all doubt is set at rest by a daughter of Mrs Dunlop, who affirms that she remembers hearing

Burns say it was written upon the Coilsfield dairy-maid. We must consequently infer, that the name Afton was adopted by our poet *pro euphoniae gratia*—suggested to him, probably, by the name of Afton Lodge, in the neighbourhood of Coilsfield, the residence of his friend and patroness Mrs Stewart of Stair.¹

FLOW GENTLY, SWEET AFTON.

TUNE—*The Yellow-haired Laddie.*

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise ;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Thou stock-dove whose echo resounds through the glen,
Ye wild whistling blackbirds in your thorny den,
Thou green-crested lapwing thy screaming forbear,
I charge you disturb not my slumbering fair.

How lofty, sweet Afton, thy neighbouring hills,
Far marked with the courses of clear winding rills ;
There daily I wander as noon rises high,
My flocks and my Mary's sweet cot in my eye.

How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,
Where wild in the woodlands the primroses blow ;
There oft as mild evening weeps over the lea,
The sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me.

Thy crystal stream, Afton, how lovely it glides,
And winds by the cot where my Mary resides ;
How wanton thy waters her snowy feet lave,
As gathering sweet flowerets she stems thy clear wave.

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, sweet river, the theme of my lays ;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Thrown off and heart-wrung as he was by Jean, it was natural enough that he should revert to Mary Campbell. On the eve of a voyage to the West Indies in a humble capacity, it was not

¹ Dr Currie stated that this song was composed in honour of Mrs Stewart herself, whose paternal property was situated on the banks of the Afton in Nithsdale. In a paper by Mr Gilbert Burns, communicating to Mr George Thomson memoranda of the subjects of his brother's songs, *Flow gently, sweet Afton*, is thus noticed: 'The poet's Highland Mary.' Dr Currie had undoubtedly been misinformed.

desirable that he should unite himself with any woman, however dear; but his soul rushed to a compensation for the desertion of Armour—prudential considerations, as usual with him where affairs of the heart were concerned, formed little or no impediment—he betook himself to Mary, and found her willing to be his for life, notwithstanding all that had passed with Jean. Such at least is the view we take of the circumstances, from all that has transpired.

It was agreed that Mary should give up her place, and go home for a short time to her friends in the Highlands, in order to arrange matters for her union with the poet. But before going—on the second Sunday of May, the 14th of the month—Mary and Burns had a farewell meeting in a sequestered spot on the banks of the Ayr. The day and the place are indicated by himself. It is probable that the lovers did not confine themselves to the banks of the Ayr, but digressed into the minor valley of the Faile, where the woods of Coilsfield compose many beautiful scenes. However this may be, Mr Cromeek tells that ‘their adieu was performed with all those simple and striking ceremonials which rustic sentiment has devised to prolong tender emotions and to impose awe. The lovers stood on each side of a small purling brook—they laved their hands in the limpid stream—and holding a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other.’ Mary presented to her lover a plain small Bible in one volume. Burns returned the compliment with a more elegant one in two volumes. The whole ceremony speaks of such an extreme anxiety for the constancy of his new mistress, as might be expected of one who had just suffered from the perjury of another. The volumes given to Mary have chanced to be preserved. On a blank-leaf in one of them is inscribed, in Burns’s handwriting, ‘And ye shall not swear by my name falsely—I am the Lord.’—*Levit.* xix. 12. On the second volume: ‘Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths.’—*Matth.* v. 33. And on a blank-leaf his name had been inscribed, together with his *mason-mark*. The lovers parted never to meet again.

The date of Burns’s attachment to Highland Mary, and several of the circumstances connected with it, have been matter of doubt and obscurity till lately. In January 1850, Mr William Douglas brought before the Society of Scottish Antiquaries an elaborate paper, making it all but perfectly certain that the affair was, what had never been hitherto suspected, an episode in the attachment to Jean Armour. He shewed that it could not have been, as several

biographers had surmised, a strictly early or juvenile attachment, as the Bible is dated in 1782, and the name of the poet is followed by the word ‘ Mossiel’—a place with which he had no connection till Martinmas 1783, when he was nearly twenty-five years of age, and where he did not reside till March of the ensuing year. Mr Douglas also traced the connection between this attachment and the design of going to the West Indies, a design of which we hear at no earlier period of his life than spring 1786. This connection appears strongly in a song which Burns afterwards published in Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum* :—

THE HIGHLAND LASSIE.

Nae gentle dames, though e'er sae fair,¹
Shall ever be my Muse’s care :
Their titles a’ are empty show ;
Gie me my Highland lassie, O.

Within the glen sae bushy, O,
Aboon the plains sae rushy, O,
I set me down wi’ right good-will,
To sing my Highland lassie, O.

Oh were yon hills and valleys mine,
Yon palace and yon gardens fine !
The world then the love should know
I bear my Highland lassie, O.

But fickle Fortune frowns on me,
And I maun cross the raging sea ;
But while my crimson currents flow,
I ’ll love my Highland lassie, O.

Although through foreign climes I range,
I know her heart will never change,
For her bosom burns with honour’s glow,
My faithful Highland lassie, O.

For her I ’ll dare the billows’ roar,
For her I ’ll trace a distant shore,
That Indian wealth may lustre throw
Around my Highland lassie, O.

She has my heart, she has my hand,
By sacred truth and honour’s band !
’Till the mortal stroke shall lay me low,
I ’m thine, my Highland lassie, O.

¹ ‘ Gentle is here used in opposition to simple, in the Scottish and old English sense of the word. Nae gentle dames—no high-blooded.’—CURRIE.

Farewell the glen sae bushy, O !
 Farewell the plain sae rushy, O !
 To other lands I now must go,
 To sing my Highland lassie, O .

Burns himself, in the notes on Johnson's Museum, which he wrote for Captain Riddel of Glenriddel,¹ says, regarding this song, it 'was a composition of mine in very early life, before I was at all known in the world. My Highland Lassie was a warm-hearted, charming young creature as ever blessed a man with generous love.' And then he goes on to relate the above story of their parting. Now, the whole circumstances detailed in this little ballad—his love, his desire of fortune for the sake of the loved one, and especially his being compelled by the frowns of fortune to cross the raging sea—entirely answer to the crisis at which Burns had now arrived, and they do not at all answer to any other period of his life of which we have any knowledge.

There is another song, which was found amongst the poet's manuscripts after his death, and which answers perfectly to the circumstances and feelings which have been represented: it is entitled by himself

A PRAYER FOR MARY.

Powers celestial ! whose protection
 Ever guards the virtuous fair,
 While in distant climes I wander,
 Let my Mary be your care :
 Let her form sae fair and faultless,
 Fair and faultless as your own,
 Let my Mary's kindred spirit
 Draw your choicest influence down.

Make the gales you waft around her
 Soft and peaceful as her breast ;
 Breathing in the breeze that fans her,
 Soothe her bosom into rest :
 Guardian angels ! oh protect her
 When in distant lands I roam ;
 To realms unknown while fate exiles me,
 Make her bosom still my home.

Burns also told Mr Thomson in 1792: 'In my very early years,

¹ Cromek's *Reliques*, p. 237.

when I was thinking of going to the West Indies, I took the following farewell of a dear girl : —

[WILL YE GO TO THE INDIES, MY MARY?]

Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,
And leave auld Scotia's shore?

Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,
Across the Atlantic's roar?¹

Oh sweet grow the lime and the orange,
And the apple on the pine;
But a' the charms o' the Indies
Can never equal thine.

I hae sworn by the Heavens to my Mary,
I hae sworn by the Heavens to be truc;
And sae may the Heavens forget me
When I forget my vow!

Oh plight me your faith, my Mary,
And plight me your lily-white hand;
Oh plight me your faith, my Mary,
Before I leave Scotia's strand.

We hae plighted our troth, my Mary,
In mutual affection to join;
And curst be the cause that shall part us!
The hour and the moment o' time!

But for the phrases, ‘very early life,’ and ‘my very early years,’ there could be no difficulty in assigning *My Highland Lassie* and *Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary?* which is evidently another expression of the same passion, to the date 1786; but Mr Douglas argued, that either Burns felt as if the lapse of six years had brought him out of youth into middle life, or he wished to maintain a mystery regarding the story of Mary. For his studying to keep the matter in some obscurity, there certainly might be motives of some cogency; for one, a dislike to recall before the mind of his wife an affair which had come somewhat awkwardly between them, and run nigh to sever them for ever. But then, it may be said, Burns was a man above disguises and secrets. So he was in general; yet did he not say in a poem which left his hand this very month—

— ‘Aye keep something to yoursel’
Ye scarcely tell to ony?’

¹ The first verse is not to be read as expressing a desire of the poet that Mary should accompany him to the West Indies; the rest of the poem makes the idea of a parting and farewell quite clear. The verse is to be accepted simply as a variation of the song whose air was adopted—*Will ye go to the Ewe-buchs, Marion?*

The ingenuity and industry of Mr Douglas had so nearly succeeded in solving this curious problem in Burns's history, that it is almost a pity to add to the evidence he has brought forward. So it is, however, that, as will be seen hereafter, proofs of a more satisfactory kind for the same conclusion have been discovered.

It is to be feared that Burns was not a man for whom his admirers can safely claim steadiness of affection, any more than they can arrogate for him a romantic or platonic delicacy. His was a heart whose pulses were synchronous with those of no other human being; he loved keenly, enthusiastically, for the time, but not necessarily for a long time; and then there were 'under-plots in the drama of his love.'¹ It appears as if there was still another maiden high in his book of passion during this agitating period. Of her he takes leave in terms nearly resembling those employed in the *Highland Lassie*, and which involve the same allusions regarding his own approaching exile from his native land:—

E L I Z A.

TUNE—*Gilderoy*.

From thee, Eliza, I must go,
And from my native shore:
The cruel fates between us throw
A boundless ocean's roar;
But boundless oceans, roaring wide
Between my love and me,
They never, never can divide
My heart and soul from thee.

Farewell, farewell, Eliza dear,
The maid that I adore!
A boding voice is in my ear,
We part to meet no more!
But the last throb that leaves my heart,
While death stands victor by,
That throb, Eliza, is thy part,
And thine that latest sigh!

This song appeared in the first edition of his poems, and the reality of the person and of the name assigned to her is attested by his telling in a letter, written on his return to Mauchline in June 1787,

¹ It is well at this time to recall what his brother Gilbert says regarding the plurality of his attachments:—‘One generally reigned paramount in his affections; but as Yorick's affections flowed out toward Madame de L—— at the remise door, while the eternal vows of Eliza were upon him, so Robert was frequently encountering other attractions, which formed so many under-plots in the drama of his love.’

that he had called for his ‘quondam Eliza.’ From a variety of circumstances, the editor has been led to conclude that Eliza was identical with the *Miss Betty*, one of the Mauchline Belles. She was an amiable girl—had felt kindly towards Burns through all his late distresses—and had thus raised a kind of love, chiefly composed of gratitude, in his bosom.

There is sufficiently clear evidence, apart from all consideration of Eliza, that the gust of passion towards Mary did not long maintain the bright integrity which was promised for it on the banks of the Faile. It is tolerably evident, from the songs, that the idea of taking Mary along with him had soon been given up, if it ever was seriously entertained. Within a very few weeks after his parting with her, we find him speaking of Jean as one who still had a sway over his affections. He tells how vainly he had been endeavouring, by dissipation and other mischiefs, to drive her out of his head, notwithstanding that he now regarded her as even more unfaithful towards himself than ever. But before giving the letter in which this sentiment is expressed, a brief recital of circumstances is necessary. At the end of March, in order to avoid the pressure of her father’s displeasure, Jean went to Paisley, to stay for some time with an uncle, Andrew Purdie, a carpenter; and here she found a friendly shelter. There was no other person in Paisley whom she knew, excepting a good-looking young weaver, named Robert Wilson, who was a native of Mauchline, and who had often danced with her at the balls there. Finding herself in want of money, she thought of applying for some to Wilson, whose profession was in those days so prosperous as to bring him in a considerable income. The young man called for her, spoke kindly, and advanced the little sum she required. He repeated the visit several times, and thus gave rise to a report which reached Mauchline, that Jean and he were likely to form a match. In reality, the young man acted at first under mere kindness: the utmost length he ever went afterwards was to tell Jean that, if she did not marry Burns, he would never take a wife while she remained disengaged. The story, however, reached the ears of Burns in its most exaggerated form, and while it made him completely miserable, it enabled him to know that Jean was still dear to him.



TO MR DAVID BRICE.¹

MOSSGIEL, June 12, 1786.

DEAR BRICE—I received your message by G. Paterson, and as I am not very throng [busy] at present, I just write to let you know that there is such a worthless, rhyming reprobate, as your humble servant, still in the land of the living, though I can scarcely say in the place of hope. I have no news to tell you that will give me any pleasure to mention, or you to hear.

Poor ill-advised ungrateful Armour came home on Friday last.² You have heard all the particulars of that affair, and a black affair it is. What she thinks of her conduct now I don't know: one thing I do know—she has made me completely miserable. Never man loved, or rather adored, a woman more than I did her; and to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all, though I won't tell her so if I were to see her, which I don't want to do. My poor dear unfortunate Jean! how happy have I been in thy arms! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy, but for her sake I feel most severely. I foresee she is in the road to, I am afraid, eternal ruin.

May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may His grace be with her and bless her in all her future life! I can have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. I have tried often to forget her; I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riots, mason-meetings, drinking-matches, and other mischief, to drive her out of my head, but all in vain. And now for a grand cure: the ship is on her way home that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then, farewell dear old Scotland! and farewell dear ungrateful Jean! for never, never will I see you more.

You will have heard that I am going to commence poet in print; and to-morrow my works go to the press. I expect it will be a volume of about 200 pages—it is just the last foolish action I intend to do; and then turn a wise man as fast as possible. Believe me to be, dear Brice, your friend and well-wisher,

R. B.

It serves to add to the strange confusion of the love-affairs of Burns, that there is a canzonet in which the same ideas which we have already seen brought forward regarding an eternal constancy to Mary and Eliza are wrought up in favour of Jean.

¹ A shoemaker in Glasgow.² Friday, 9th June.

THOUGHT CRUEL FATE.

TUNE—*The Northern Lass.*

Though cruel fate should bid us part,
Far as the pole and line ;
Her dear idea round my heart
Should tenderly entwine.

Though mountains rise and deserts howl,
And oceans roar between,
Yet dearer than my deathless soul,
I still would love my Jean.

There is no evidence that this slight lyric was composed at the crisis in question; but the idea of a parting ‘far as the pole and line’ is suspicious. The piece, as will be seen afterwards, appears early in the second volume of Johnson’s Museum, which was in the engraver’s hands during the latter half of 1787, and, strangely enough, it stands, with an acknowledgment of the authorship, *vis-à-vis* to the anonymous *Highland Lassie*.

In the midst of the cross-fire of various affections, and the dreary prospects of exile, the comic muse of Burns was not inactive. He composed, on the 4th of June, a poem on the reigning scandals of his village—cases on which the session record throws ample light, if light were of any use in the matter; but unfortunately, though the mock-serious is most amusingly exemplified in this poem, its license of phrase renders it utterly unfit for publication. A few days earlier, he dates a satirical poem on a subject much out of his usual walk. ‘On Tuesday [May 23] there was a meeting of the Highland Society at London for the encouragement of the fisheries in the Highlands, &c. Three thousand pounds were immediately subscribed by eleven gentlemen present for this particular purpose. The Earl of Breadalbane informed the meeting that five hundred persons had agreed to emigrate from the estates of Mr McDonald of Glengarry; that they had subscribed money, purchased ships, &c., to carry their design into effect. The noblemen and gentlemen agreed to co-operate with government to frustrate their design; and to recommend to the principal noblemen and gentlemen in the Highlands to endeavour to prevent emigration, by improving the fisheries, agriculture, and manufactures, and particularly to enter into a subscription for that purpose.’ Such is a very simple-looking announcement in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* of 30th May. One would have thought

there was little in it to excite a jealous feeling regarding the Highland proprietors, whom we have since seen vilipended not a little for the very opposite procedure. So it is, however, that Burns took up the matter otherwise, and penned, though he did not publish, an

A D D R E S S O F B E E L Z E B U B

To the Right Honourable the Earl of Breadalbane, President of the Right Honourable and Honourable the Highland Society, which met on the 23d of May last at the Shakspeare, Covent Garden, to concert ways and means to frustrate the designs of five hundred Highlanders, who, as the society were informed by Mr Mackenzie of Applecross,¹ were so audacious as to attempt an escape from their lawful lords and masters, whose property they were, by emigrating from the lands of Mr M'Donald of Glengarry to the wilds of Canada, in search of that fantastic thing—LIBERTY.

Long life, my lord, and health be yours,	
Unscaithed by hungered Highland boors;	Unhurt
Lord, grant nae duddie desperate beggar,	ragged
Wi' dirk, claymore, or rusty trigger,	
May twin auld Scotland o' a lific	deprive
She likes—as lambkins like a knife.	
Faith, you and Applecross were right	
To keep the Highland hounds in sight;	
I doubt na ! they wad bid nae better	propose
Than, let them ance out owre the water,	
Then up amang thae lakes and seas,	
They'll mak what rules and laws they please;	
Some daring Hancock, or a Franklin,	
May set their Highland bluid a-ranklin' ;	
Some Washington again may head them,	
Or some Montgomery, fearless, lead them,	
Till God knows what may be effected,	
When by such heads and hearts directed ;	
Poor dunghill sons of dirt and mire	
May to patrician rights aspire !	
Nae sage North now, nor sager Sackville,	
To watch and premier o'er the pack vile,	
And whare will ye get Howes and Clintons	
To bring them to a right repentance,	
To cewe the rebel generation,	
And save the honour o' the nation ?	

¹ Mr Mackenzie of Applecross, a considerable proprietor in the west of Ross-shire, figures on many occasions as a liberal man. Mr Knox, in his *Tour of the Highlands*, penned about this very time, mentions an act of Mr Mackenzie's precisely contrary in its character to the motive which the rash poet attributes to him. 'Perceiving,' says Knox, 'the bad policy of servitude in the Highlands, Mr Mackenzie has totally relinquished all the feudal claims upon the labour of his tenants, whom he pays with the strictest regard to justice at the rate of sevenpence or eightpence for every day employed upon his works.'

They, and be d—— ! what right hae they
To meat or sleep, or light o' day ?
Far less to riches, power, or freedom,
But what your lordship likes to gie them ?

But hear, my lord ! Glengarry, hear !
Your hand's owre light on them, I fear ;
Your factors, grieves, trustees, and bailies,
I canna say but they do gaylies ; pretty well
They lay aside a' tender mercies,
And tirl the hallions to the birses ; strip—clowns—bristles
Yet while they're only poind't and herrict, despoiled
They'll keep their stubborn Highland spirit ;
But smash them, crash them a' to spails ! chips
And rot the dyvors i' the jails ! bankrupts
The young dogs, swinge them to the labour ;
Let wark and hunger mak them sober !
The hizzies, if they're oughtlins fawson, girls—handsome
Let them in Drury Lane be lessoned !
And if the wives and dirty brats
E'en thigger at your doors and yetts, beg—gates
Flaffan wi' duds and gray wi' beas', Fluttering—vermin
Frightin' awa' your deucks and geese,
Get out a horsewhip or a jowler,
The langest thong, the fiercest growler,
And gar the tattered gipsies pack,
Wi' a' their bastards on their back !
Go on, my lord ! I lang to meet you,
And in my *house at hame* to greet you ;
Wi' common lords ye shanna mingle,
The benmost neuk beside the ingle, innermost
At my right han' assigned your seat
'Tween Herod's hip and Polycrate—
Or, if you on your station tarrow,
Between Almagro and Pizarro,
A seat, I'm sure, ye're weel deservin' ;
And till ye come—Your humble servant,

BEELZEBUB.¹

June 1st, Anno Mundi 5790 [A. D. 1786.]

The subscription for the works of the Mossiel ploughman had now, we see, been so far successful, that the printing of them was determined on. This business was undertaken by John Wilson, a bookseller at Kilmarnock, who afterwards became a thriving

¹ This poem came through the hands of Rankine of Adamhill to those of a gentleman of Ayr, who gave it to the world in the *Edinburgh Magazine* for February 1818. A copy in the poet's handwriting is, or was lately, in the possession of a person in humble life at Jedburgh.

trader, and the founder of the first Ayrshire newspaper (the *Ayr Advertiser*), by which he realised a competency. In negotiating with Wilson, the intervention of Burns's Kilmarnock friends had of course been serviceable. With them the poet had for some weeks much intercourse, while engaged in seeing his works through the press. He was still, during this time, active in the preparation of pieces which might properly see the light; and it is remarkable how many of these were of a lively cast. One was of a political character, and treated the highest personages of the realm in a style of good-natured raillery such as scarcely any poet but Burns could have exemplified.

A D R E A M.

'Thoughts, words, and deeds the statute blames with reason;
But surely dreams were ne'er indicted treason.'

On reading in the public papers the *Laureate's Ode*,¹ with the other parade of June 4, 1786, the author was no sooner dropt asleep, than he imagined himself transported to the birthday levee; and in his dreaming fancy made the following 'Address':—

Guid-mornin' to your Majesty!
May Heaven augment your blisses,
On every new birthday, ye see,
A humble poet wishes!
My bardship here, at your levee,
On sic a day as this is,
Is sure an uncouth sight to see,
Amang thaе birthday dresses
Sae fine this day.

I see ye're complimented thrang,
By many a lord and lady;
'God save the king!' 's a cuckoo sang
That's unco easy said aye;
The poets, too, a venal gang,
Wi' rhymes weel-turned and ready,
Wad gar ye trow ye ne'er do wrang,
But aye unerring steady,
On sie a day.

mako

¹ Thomas Warton was then in this servile and ridiculous office. His ode for June 4, 1786, begins as follows:—

'When Freedom nursed her native fire
In ancient Greece, and ruled the lyre,
Her bards disdainful, from the tyrant's brow
The tinsel gifts of flattery tore,
But paid to guiltless power their willing vow,
And to the throne of virtuous kings,' &c.

On these verses the rhymes of the Ayrshire bard must be allowed to form an odd enough commentary.

For me ! before a monarch's face
 Even there I winna flatter ;
 For neither pension, post, nor place,
 Am I your humble debtor :
 So, nae reflection on your grace,
 Your kingship to bespatter ;
 There 's mony waur been o' the race,
 And aiblins ane been better
 Than you this day.

'Tis very true, my sovereign king,
 My skill may weel be doubted :
 But facts are chiels that winna ding,
 And downa be disputed :
 Your royal nest, beneath your wing,
 Is e'en right reft and clouted,¹
 And now the third part of the string,
 And less, will gang about it
 Than did ae day.

Far be 't frae me that I aspire
 To blame your legislation,
 Or say ye wisdom want, or fire,
 To rule this mighty nation !
 But faith ! I muckle doubt, my sire,
 Ye 've trusted ministrition
 To chaps, wha, in a barn or byre,
 Wad better filled their station
 Than courts yon day.

And now ye 've gien auld Britain peace ;
 Her broken shins to plaster ;
 Your sair taxation does her flesce,
 Till she has scarce a tester ;
 For me, thank God, my life 's a lease,
 Nae bargain wearing faster,
 Or, faith ! I fear, that, wi' the geese,
 I shortly boost to pasture
 I' the craft some day.

I 'm no mistrusting Willie Pitt,
 When taxes he enlarges
 (And Will 's a true guid fallow's get,²
 A name not envy spairges),

be beaten
cannot

broken and patched

behoved
field

asperses

¹ The American colonies being lost.

² Gait, gett, or gyte, a homely substitute for the word child in Scotland. Sir Walter Scott speaks somewhere of the *gaits' class* in the Edinburgh High School—namely, the class containing the youngest pupils. The above stanza is not the only testimony of admiration which Burns pays to the great Earl of Chatham.

That he intends to pay your debt,
And lessen a' your charges;
But, G—sake! let nae saving fit
Abridge your bonny barges,
And boats this day.

Adieu, my liege! may Freedom geck
Beneath your high protection;
And may you rax Corruption's neck,
And gie her for dissection.
But since I 'm here, I 'll no neglcct,
In loyal, true affection,
To pay your Queen, with due respect,
My fealty and subjeccction
This great birthday.

Hail Majesty Most Excellent!
While nobles strive to please ye,
Will ye accept a compliment
A simple poet gies ye?
Thae bonny bairn-time, Heaven has lent, children
Still higher may they heeze ye raise
In bliss, till fate some day is sent,
For ever to release ye
Frac care that day.

For you, young potentate o' Wales,
I tell your Highness fairly,
Down Pleasure's stream, wi' swelling sails,
I'm tauld ye're driving rarely;
But some day ye may gnaw your nails,
And curse your folly sairly,
That e'er ye brak Diana's pales,
Or rattled dice wi' Charlie,²
By night or day.

Yet aft a ragged cowte's been known colt
To mak a noble aiver; cart-horse
So, ye may doucely fill a throne,
For a' their clish-ma-clayer; talk

¹ On the supplies for the navy being voted, spring 1786, Captain Macbride counselled some changes in that force, particularly the giving up of 64-gun ships, which occasioned a good deal of discussion.

² Charles James Fox.

There, him at Agincourt wha shone,
 Few better were or braver;
 And yet, wi' funny, queer Sir John,
 He was an unco shaver,
 For monie a day.¹

For you, right reverend Osnaburg,²
 Nane sets the lawn-sleeve sweeter,
 Although a ribbon at your lug
 Wad been a dress completer:
 As ye disown yon paughty dog
 That bears the keys of Peter,
 Then, swith! and get a wife to hug,
 Or, trouth! ye'll stain the mitre
 Some luckless day.

proud

Young, royal Tarry Breeks,³ I learn,
 Ye've lately come athwart her,
 A glorious galley,⁴ stem and stern,
 Weel rigged for Venus' barter;
 But first hang out, that she 'll discern,
 Your hymeneal charter,
 Then heave aboard your grapple-airn,
 And, large upon her quarter,
 Come full that day.

Ye, lastly, bonny blossoms a',
 Ye royal lasses dainty,
 Heaven mak ye guid as weel as braw,
 And gie you lads a-plenty:
 But sneer na British boys awa',
 For kings are unco scant aye;
 And German gentles are but sma',
 They 're better just than want aye
 On ony day.

God bless you a'! consider now,
 Ye're unco muckle dautet;
 But ere the course o' life be through,
 It may be bitter sautet:

caressed

¹ It appears from Tyler's *Memoirs of Henry V.* (2 vols. 1838), that that monarch was not so remarkable for a frolicsome youth as Shakspeare, guided by the chroniclers, has led us to believe. The basis of the parallel drawn by the poet being thus destroyed, we may be the less surprised that the prophecy he grounds upon it did not prove very sound.

² Frederick, the second son of George III., at first Bishop of Osnaburg, afterwards Duke of York.

³ William Henry, third son of George III., afterwards Duke of Clarence and King William IV.

⁴ Alluding to the newspaper account of a certain royal sailor's amour.—B.

And I hae seen their coggie fou,
That yet hae tarrow't at it;¹ bowl full
But or the day was done, I trow,
The laggen² they hae clautet
Fu' clean that day. scraped

It is perhaps also to this period that we are to assign a more noted poem—the *Holy Fair*.

The transactions described in this piece are those which attended a rural celebration of the communion in Scotland till a very recent period, if not till the present day. But it is important to notice that the rite itself, and even the place where it was administered, form no part of the picture. Burns limits himself to the assemblage, partly composed of parishioners and partly of strangers, which takes place on such occasions, in some open space near the church, where a succession of clergymen, usually from the neighbouring parishes, give from a *tent* or movable pulpit a succession of services, while a lesser body are attending the more solemn ritual within doors. The particular scene referred to by the poet is the church-yard of Mauchline,³ where the crowd sat upon tombstones, forms, and stools, or stretched themselves on the ground, and thus must have formed a picture of a very remarkable kind. That Burns's description is not exaggerated in any particular, is rendered certain by a passage which we shall take leave to adduce from a pamphlet published in the year of the poet's birth, under the title of *A Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland*. 'In Scotland,' says this writer, 'they run from kirk to kirk, and flock to see a sacrament, and make the same use of it that the papists do of their pilgrimages and processions; that is, indulge themselves in drunkenness, folly, and idleness. Most of the servants, when they agree to serve their masters in the western parts of the kingdom, make a special provision that they shall have liberty to go to a certain number of fairs, or to an equal number

¹ To *tarrow* at food is to linger over it from dislike or want of appetite.

² The angle between the side and bottom of a wooden dish.

³ The communion was administered at Mauchline on the second Sunday of August, and it seems to have been very attractive, for while the whole population of the parish was not probably above 1500, the number of communicants stated in the session-books for the occasion of 1784 was 1350—that for 1785 was 1242—and that for 1786 'about fourteen hundred.' The tables along the church held a hundred and five persons, and to accommodate the whole multitude of applicants, the minister officiating on each occasion was allowed only fifteen minutes.

of sacraments; and as they consider a sacrament, or an occasion (as they call the administration of the Lord's Supper), in a neighbouring parish in the same light in which they do at a fair, so they behave at it much in the same manner. I defy Italy, in spite of all its superstition, to produce a scene better fitted to raise pity and regret in a religious, humane, and understanding heart, or to afford an ampler field for ridicule to the careless and profane, than what they call a field-preaching upon one of those occasions. At the time of the administration of the Lord's Supper upon the Thursday, Saturday, and Monday, we have preaching in the fields near the church. At first, you find a great number of men and women lying together upon the grass; here they are sleeping and snoring, some with their faces towards heaven, others with their faces turned downwards, or covered with their bonnets; there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making assignations to go home together in the evening, or to meet in some ale-house; in another place you see a pious circle sitting round an ale-barrel, many of which stand ready upon carts for the refreshment of the saints. The heat of the summer season, the fatigue of travelling, and the greatness of the crowd, naturally dispose them to drink; which inclines some of them to sleep, works up the enthusiasm of others, and contributes not a little to produce those miraculous conversions that sometimes happen at these occasions; in a word, in this sacred assembly there is an odd mixture of religion, sleep, drinking, courtship, and a confusion of sexes, ages, and characters. When you get a little nearer the speaker, so as to be within the reach of the sound, though not of the sense of the words, for that can only reach a small circle, you will find some weeping and others laughing, some pressing to get nearer the tent or tub in which the parson is sweating, bawling, jumping, and beating the desk; others fainting with the stifling heat, or wrestling to extricate themselves from the crowd: one seems very devout and serious, and the next moment is scolding and cursing his neighbour for squeezing or treading on him; in an instant after, his countenance is composed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, sighing, and weeping for his sins: in a word, there is such an absurd mixture of the serious and comic, that were we convened for any other purpose than that of worshipping the God and Governor of Nature, the scene would exceed all *power of face*.

One would almost suppose that the poet had only versified this description, so nearly does his poem coincide with it. It may be added, that the *Leith Races* of Fergusson served him as a literary

model. The Edinburgh poet is there conducted to the festive scene by an imaginary being, whom he names MIRTH, exactly as Burns is conducted to the Holy Fair by FUN; but the poetical painting of the Ayrshire bard far distances that of his predecessor.

THE HOLY FAIR.

'A robe of seeming truth and trust
Hid crafty observation;
And secret hung, with poisoned crust,
The dirk of Defamation:
A mask that like the gorget shewed,
Dye-varying on the pigeon;
And for a mantle large and broad,
He wrapt him in Religion.'

Hypocrisy à-la-Mode.

Upon a simmer Sunday-morn,
Whon Nature's face is fair,
I walkèd forth to view the corn,
And snuff the cauler air. fresh
The rising sun o'er Galston muirs,
Wi' glorious light was glintin';
The hares were hirplin' down the furs, limping
The lav'rocks they were chantin'
Fu' sweet that day.

As lightsomely I glowl'd abroad,
To see a scene sac gay,
Three hizzies, early at the road, wenches
Cam skelpin' up the way;
Twa had mantecles o' dolefu' black,
But ane wi' lyart lining; gray
The third, that gaed a-wee a-back,
Was in the fashion shining,
Fu' gay that day.

The twa appeared like sisters twin,
In feature, form, and claes;
Their visage withered, lang, and thin,
And sour as ony slaes:
The third cam up, hap-step-an'-lowp,
As light as ony lambic,
And wi' a curchie low did stoop,
As soon as e'er she saw me,
Fu' kind that day.

Wi' bonnet aff, quoth I: 'Sweet lass,
 I think ye seem to ken me;
 I'm sure I've seen that bonny face,
 But yet I eanna name ye.'
 Quo' she, and laughin' as she spak,
 And taks me by the hands:
 'Ye, for my sake, hae gien the feck
 Of a' the ten commands
 A screed some day.'

most

'My name is Fun—your eronie dear,
 The nearest friend ye hae;
 And this is Superstition here,
 And that's Hypocrisy.
 I'm gaun to Mauchline Holy Fair,
 To spend an hour in daffin':
 Gin ye'll go there, yon runkled pair,
 We will get famous laughin'
 At them this day.'

sport

Quoth I: 'With a' my heart, I'll do't;
 I'll get my Sunday's sark on,
 And meet you on the holy spot—
 Faith, we'se hae fine remarkin'!
 Then I gaed hame at crowdie-time,
 And soon I made me ready;
 For roads were clad, from side to side,
 Wi' mony a weary body,
 In droves that day.'

breakfast

Here farmers gash, in ridin' graith,
 Gaed hoddin by their cotters;
 There, swankies young, in braw braid clraith,
 Are springin' o'er the gutters.
 The lasses, skelpin' barefit, thrang,
 In silks and scarlets glitter;
 Wi' sweet-milk cheese, in monie a whang,
 And farls baked wi' butter,
 Fu' crump that day.

 sensible—attiro
 jogging
 striplings

 cut
 cakes

When by the plate we set our nose,
 Weel heapèd up wi' ha'pence,
 A greedy glowr Black-bonnet throws,
 And we maun draw our tippence.¹

¹ Black-bonnet, a cant name for the elder stationed beside the plate at the door for receiving the offerings of the congregation.

Then in we go to see the show ;
 On every side they're gath'rin',
 Some carrying dails, some chairs, and stools,
 And some are busy blethrin'
 Right loud that day.

chatting

Here stands a shed to fend the showers,
 And screen our country gentry,
 There, Racer Jess,¹ and twa-three w—s,
 Are blinkin' at the entry.
 Here sits a raw of tittlin' jauds,
 Wi' heaving breast and bare neck,
 And there a batch o' wabster lads,
 Blackguarding frae Kilmarnock
 For fun this day,

Here, some are thinkin' on their sins,
 And some upo' their clacs ;
 Ane curses feet that fyl'd his shins,
 Anither sighs and prays :
 On this hand sits a chosen swatch,
 Wi' screwed-up, grace-proud faces ;
 On that a set o' chaps at watch,
 Thrang winkin' on the lasses
 To chairs that day.

sample

Oh happy is that man and blest !
 Nae wonder that it pride him !
 Wha's ain dear lass, that he likes best,
 Comes clinkin' down beside him !
 Wi' arm repos'd on the chair back,
 He sweetly does compose him ;
 Which, by degrees, slips round her neck,
 An's loof upon her bosom,
 Unkenn'd that day.

Now a' the congregation o'er
 Is silent expectation :
 For Moodie speels the holy door,
 Wi' tidings o' d——tion.²

¹ A poor half-witted girl of the name of Gibson (daughter of Poosie Nansie), who was remarkable for pedestrian powers, and sometimes went with messages for hire.

² In the Kilmarnock edition, the word was salvation : it was changed at the suggestion of Dr Blair of Edinburgh. Moodie was the minister of Riccarton, and one of the heroes of *The Twa Herds*. He was a never-failing assistant at the Mauchline sacraments. His personal appearance and style of oratory were exactly such as described by the poet. He dwelt chiefly on the terrors of the law. On one occasion, he told the audience that they would find the text in John viii. 44, but it was so applicable to their case, that there was no need of his reading it to them. The verse begins : 'Ye are of your father the devil,' &c.

Should Hornie, as in ancient days,
 'Mang sons o' God present him,
 The very sight o' Moodie's face
 To 's ain het hame had sent him
 Wi' fright that day.

Hear how he clears the points o' Faith
 Wi' rattlin' and wi' thumpin' !
 Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,
 He's stampin' and he's jumpin' !
 His lengthened chin, his turned-up snout,
 His eldritch squeel and gestures,
 Oh how they fire the heart devout,
 Like cantharidian plasters,
 On sic a day !

unearthly

But hark ! the tent has changed its voice ;
 There's peace and rest nae langer :
 For a' the real judges rise,
 They canna sit for anger.
 Smith opens out his cauld harangues,¹
 On practice and on morals ;
 And aff the godly pour in thrangs,
 To gie the jars and barrels
 A lift that day.

What signifies his barren shine,
 Of moral powers and reason ?
 His English style and gesture fine
 Are a' clean out o' season.
 Like Socrates or Antonine,
 Or some auld pagan heathen,
 The moral man he does define,
 But ne'er a word o' faith in
 That's right that day.

In guid time comes an antidote
 Against sic poisoned nostrum ;
 For Peebles, frae the Water-fit,²
 Ascends the holy rostrum :

¹ Mr (afterwards Dr) George Smith, minister of Galston—the same whom the poet introduces in a different feeling, under the appellation of Irvine-side in *The Kirk's Alarm*. Burns meant on this occasion to compliment him on his rational mode of preaching, but the friends of the divine regarded the stanza as calculated to injure his popularity. A brother clergyman recollects the following anecdote of Mr Smith :—When he was a bachelor, and officiating in a neighbouring church, a beautiful young lady, very handsomely attired, entered, after he had begun his sermon. He was so much struck by her appearance as to pause for a few seconds, and forget the thread of his discourse. He thus apologised to the congregation : ‘ My friends, we are all liable to mistakes and errors ; let us recollect ourselves a little’—and then went on.

² The Rev. Mr (afterwards Dr) William Peebles, minister of Newton-upon-Ayr, often called. VOL. I.

See, up he's got the Word o' God,
 And meek and mim has viewed it,
 While Common Sense has ta'en the road,
 And aff and up the Cowgate,¹
 Fast, fast that day.

primly

Wee Miller² niest the guard relieves,
 And orthodoxy raibles,
 Though in his heart he weel believes,
 And thinks it auld wives' fables :
 But, faith ! the birkie wants a manse,
 So, cannily he hums them ;
 Although his carnal wit and sense
 Like hafflins-ways o'ercomes him
 At times that day.

rattles

Now but and ben the change-house fills,
 Wi' yell-caup commentators ;
 Here's crying out for bakes and gills,
 And there the pint-stoup clatters ;
 While thick and thrang, and loud and lang,
 Wi' logic and wi' scripture,
 They raise a din, that, in the end,
 Is like to breed a rupture
 O' wrath that day.

biscuits

from its geographical situation, the *Water-fit*. He was in great favour at Ayr among the orthodox party, though much inferior in ability to the moderate ministers of that ancient burgh. Robert Hamilton, a crack-pated pauper, who lived long in Ayr, and amused everybody by his droll sayings, one day thus addressed a citizen in the hearing of one of these heretical gentlemen: ‘I dreamt yestreen I was dead, and at the door o’ heaven ; and whan I knocked at the door, Peter said : “ Wha’s there ? ” “ It’s me, Mr Robert Hamilton.” “ Whare d’yo come frae ? ” “ Frae the toon o’ Ayr.” “ Get awa’ wi’ ye ! Ye canna get in here. Thero has nane been admitted frae that toon this twa hunner year.” Whan I gang back, I’ll say I’m come frae Prestwick or the Newton.’ Meaning, in the latter case, that he would have the benefit of the reputation of Mr Peebles’s ministrations.

¹ The Cowgate is a street running off the main one of Mauchline, exactly opposite the entrance to the church-yard. The sense of the passage might be supposed allegorical, and this is the theory which the present editor is inclined to adopt. He must, however, state that a more literal sense is attached to it by the best-informed persons in Mauchline. It is said that Mr Mackenzie, the surgeon of the village, and a friend of Burns, had recently written on some controversial topic under the title of *Common Sense*. On the particular day which Burns is supposed to have had in view, Mackenzie was engaged to join Sir John Whitefoord of Ballochmyle, and go to Dumfries House, in Auchinleck parish, in order to dine with the Earl of Dumfries. The doctor, therefore, after attending church, and listening to some of the outdoor harangues, was seen to leave the assembly, and go off along the Cowgate, on his way to Ballochmyle, exactly as Peebles ascended the rostrum.

² The Rev. Mr Miller, afterwards minister of Kilmaurs. He was of remarkably low stature, but enormous girth. Burns believed him at the time to lean at heart to the moderate party. This stanza, virtually the most depreciatory in the whole poem, is said to have retarded Miller’s advancement.

Leeze me on drink ! it gies us mair
 Than either school or college :
 It kindles wit, it waukens lair,
 It pangs us fou o' knowledge.
 Be't whisky gill, or penny wheep,
 Or ony stronger potion,
 It never fails, on drinking deep,
 To kittle up our notion
 By night or day.

crams

The lads and lasses, blithely bent
 To mind baith saul and body,
 Sit round the table weel content,
 And steer about the toddy.
 On this ane's dress, and that ane's leuk,
 They're making observations ;
 While some are cozie i' the neuk,
 And formin' assignations
 To meet some day.

But now the L—'s ain trumpet touts,
 Till a' the hills are rairin',
 And echoes back return the shouts—
 Black Russell¹ is na sparin' :
 His pierceng words, like Highland swords,
 Divide the joints and marrow ;
 His talk o' hell, whare devils dwell,
 Our vera sauls does harrow²
 Wi' fright that day.

roaring

A vast, unbottomed, boundless pit,
 Filled fou o' lowin' brunstane,
 Wha's ragin' flame, and scorchin' heat,
 Wad melt the hardest whunstane !
 The half-asleep start up wi' fear,
 And think they hear it roarin',
 When presently it does appear
 "Twas but some neebor snorin'
 Asleep that day.

'Twad be owre lang a tale to tell
 How monie stories past,
 And how they crowded to the yill,
 When they were a' dismist :

¹ The Rev. John Russell, at this time minister of the Chapel-of-Ease, Kilmarnock, afterwards minister of Stirling, one of the heroes of *The Twa Herds*. A correspondent says:

'He was the most tremendous man I ever saw: Black Hugh Maepherson was a beauty in comparison. His voice was like thunder, and his sentiments were such as must have shocked any class of hearers in the least more refined than those whom he usually addressed.'

² Shakspeare's *Hamlet*.—B.

How drink gaed round, in cogs and caups,
 Amang the forms and benches :
 And cheese and bread, frae women's laps,
 Was dealt about in lunches,
 And dauds that day.

In comes a gauky, gash guidwife,
 And sits down by the fire,
 Sync draws her kebbuck and her knife ;
 The lasses they are shyer.
 The auld guidmen, about the grace,
 Frac side to side they bother,
 Till some ane by his bonnet lays,
 And gies them 't like a tether,
 Fu' lang that day.

fat
cheese

Waesucks ! for him that gets nac lass,
 Or lasses that haec naething !
 Sma' need has he to say a grace,
 Or melvic his braw claitheing !
 Oh wives, be mindfu' anee yoursel'
 How bonny lads ye wanted,
 And dinna, for a kebbuck-heel,
 Let lasses be affronted
 On sic a day !

soil with meal

Now Clinkumbell,¹ wi' rattlin' tow,
 Begins to jow and croon ;
 Some swagger hame, the best they dow,
 Some wait the afternoon.
 At slaps the billies halt a blink,
 Till lasses strip their shoon :
 Wi' faith and hope, and love and drink,
 They're a' in famous tune
 For crack that day.

can

How monie hearts this day converts
 O' sinners and o' lasses !
 Their hearts o' stane, gin night, are gane,
 As saft as ony flesh is.
 There's some are fou o' love divine ;
 There's some are fou o' brandy ;
 And monie jobs that day begin
 May end in houghmagandy
 Some ither day.

¹ Variation—‘ Now Robin Gib,’ &c.

In Burns's time, this poem was much relished by the moderate clergy, Dr Blair declaring it to be the most masterly satire of its kind in existence. In these days of better taste, a regret will be generally felt that Burns should have been tempted or provoked into such subjects. There is, however, a general belief in Ayrshire, that the *Holy Fair* was attended with a good effect, for since its appearance, the custom of resorting to the 'occasion' in neighbouring parishes for the sake of holiday-making has been much abated, and a great increase of decorous observance has taken place.

During the latter part of June, and the greater part if not the whole of July, the immortal poems were going through the press at Kilmarnock. While preparing to launch so many satiric shafts at the *Old-Light* clergy, Burns was brought into a strange personal relation with one of them. Since it was ruled by the angry father that he and Jean must not be considered as man and wife, it was of course important that their freedom from the bonds of marriage should be fully certified. For this purpose, it was necessary that they should submit to the censures of the church. Accordingly, our poet had now to make a series of public appearances before the congregation—the last of them on the 6th of August, when a rebuke was administered. Mr Auld acted gently with his satirist, and indulged him with permission to stand in his own seat, instead of the common place of repentance, on the condition that, in the event of his prospering in the West Indies, he should remember the poor of Mauchline.

TO JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.

MOSSGIEL, 9th July 1786.

With the sincerest grief I read your letter. You are truly a son of misfortune. I shall be extremely anxious to hear from you how your health goes on—if it is anyway re-establishing, or if Leith promises well—in short, how you feel in the inner man.

I have waited on Armour since her return home; not from the least view of reconciliation, but merely to ask for her health, and, to you I will confess it, from a foolish hankering fondness, very ill placed indeed. The mother forbade me the house, nor did Jean shew that penitence that might have been expected. However, the priest, I am informed, will give me a certificate as a single man, if I comply with the rules of the church, which for that very reason I intend to do.

I am going to put on sackcloth and ashes this day. I am indulged so far as to appear in my own seat. *Peccavi, pater; miserere mei.* My book will be ready in a fortnight. If you have any subscribers, return them by Counell. The Lord stand with the righteous—Amen, amen!

R. B.

During this period, too, his pen must have been still very busy.
He composed a playful ode

O N A S C O T C H B A R D,

GONE TO THE WEST INDIES.

A' ye wha live by sowps o' drink,
A' ye wha live by crambo-clink,
A' ye wha live and never think,
 Come, mourn wi' me !
Our billie's gien us a' a jink,¹
 And owre the sea.

versifying

Lament him a' ye rantin' core,
Wha dearly like a random-splore,
Nae mair he'll join the merry roar
 In social key ;
For now he's ta'en anither shore,
 And owre the sea !

frolic

Auld cantie Kyle may weepers wear,
And stain them wi' the saut, saut tear ;
'Twill mak her poor auld heart, I fear,
 In flinders flee ;
He was her laureate monie a year,
 That's owre the sea.

splinters

He saw misfortune's cauld nor-west
Lang mustering up a bitter blast ;
A jellet brak his heart at last,
 Ill may she be !
So, took a berth afore the mast,
 And owre the sea.

To tremble under Fortune's cummock,
On scarcee a bellyfu' o' drummock,
Wi' his proud, independent stomach,
 Could ill agree ;
So row't his hurdies in a hammock,
 And owre the sea.

rod

meal and water

He ne'er was gien to great misguiding,
Yet coin his pouches wadna bide in ;
Wi' him it ne'er was under hiding—
 He dealt it free :
The Muse was a' that he took pride in,
 That's owre the sea.

¹ 'Our brother has eluded us all.'

Jamaica bodies, use him weel,
 And hap him in a cozie biel :
 Ye'll find him aye a dainty chiel,
 And fou o' glee ;
 He wadna wrang'd the very deil,
 That's owre the sea.

wrap—snug shelter

Fareweel, my rhyme-composing billie !
 Your native soil was right ill-willie ;
 But may ye flourish like a lily,
 Now bonnilie !
 I'll toast ye in my hinmost gillie,
 Though owre the sea !

In a different spirit, he wrote an epitaph for himself—a confession of his errors so solemn and so touching, as to take the sting from every other comment on the subject :—

A B A R D ' S E P I T A P H.

Is there a whim-inspirèd fool,
 Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule,
 Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool, bashful—succumb
 Let him draw near ;
 And owre this grassy heap sing dool,
 And drap a tear.

Is there a bard of rustic song,
 Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,
 That weekly this area throng,
 Oh, pass not by !
 But, with a frater-feeling strong,
 Here heave a sigh.

Is there a man, whose judgment clear,
 Can others teach the course to steer,
 Yet runs himself life's mad career,
 Wild as the wave ;
 Herc pause—and, through the starting tear
 Survey this grave.

The poor inhabitant below,
 Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
 And keenly felt the friendly glow,
 And softer flame ;
 But thoughtless follies laid him low,
 And stained his name !

Reader, attend—whether thy soul
 Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
 Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,
 In low pursuit;
 Know, prudent, cautious self-control
 Is wisdom's root.¹

Friendship had also its demands upon him. He wrote a Dedication of his Poems to Gavin Hamilton, taking the opportunity not merely to characterise that generous-natured man, but to throw out a few parting sareasms at orthodoxy and her partisans. This poem, however, was not placed at the front of the forthcoming volume, though included in its pages:—

A DEDICATION TO GAVIN HAMILTON, Esq.

Expect na, sir, in this narration,
 A fleechin, fletch'rin dedication,
 To roose you up, and ca' you guid,
 And sprung o' great and noble bluid,
 Because ye're surnamed like his Grace;²
 Perhaps related to the racee;
 Then when I'm tired, and sae are ye,
 Wi' monie a fulsome, sinfu' lie,
 Set up a face, how I stop short,
 For fear your modesty be hurt.

flattering
praise

This may do—maun do, sir, wi' them wha
 Maun please the great folk for a wamefou;
 For me! sae laigh I needna bow,
 For, L— be thankit, I can plough;
 And when I downa yoke a naig,
 Then, L— be thankit, I can beg;
 Sae I shall say, and that's nac flatterin',
 It's just sic poet, and sic patron.

cannot

The Poet, some guid angel help him,
 Or else, I fear, some ill ane skelp him,
 He may do weel for a' he's done yet,
 But only he's no just begun yet.

beat

The Patron (sir, ye maun forgie me,
 I winna lie, come what will o' me),
 On every hand it will allowed be,
 He's just—nae better than he should be.

¹ See Appendix, No. 9.

² The Duke of Hamilton.

I readily and freely grant,
 He downa see a poor man want ;
 What 's no his ain he winna tak it ,
 What ance he says he winna break it ;
 Ought he can lend he 'll no refus 't
 Till aft his gudeness is abused ;
 And rascals whiles that do him wrang ,
 Even that, he does na mind it lang :
 As master, landlord, husband, father ,
 He does na fail his part in either .

But then nae thanks to him for a' that ,
 Nac godly symptom ye can ca' that ;
 It 's naething but a milder feature
 Of our poor sinfu' , corrupt nature :
 Yc 'll get the best o' moral works ,
 'Mang black Gentoos and pagan Turks ,
 Or hunters wild on Ponotaxi ,
 Wha never heard of orthodoxy .
 That he 's the poor man 's friend in need ,
 The gentleman in word and deed ,
 It 's no through terror of d——tion ;
 It 's just a carnal inclination .

Morality, thou deadly bane ,
 Thy tens o' thousands thou hast slain !
 Vain is his hope whose stay and trust is
 In moral mercy, truth, and justice !

No—stretch a point to catch a plack ;
 Abuse a brother to his back ;
 Steal through a winnock frae a w—— ,
 But point the rake that taks the door ;
 Be to the poor like ony wliunstane ,
 And haud their noses to the grunstane ,
 Ply every art o' legal thieving ;
 No matter—stick to sound believing !

Learn three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces ,
 Wi' weel-spread looves, and lang wry faces ; palms
 Grunt up a solemn, lengthened groan ,
 And d— a' parties but your own ;
 I 'll warrant, then, ye 're nae deceiver—
 A steady, sturdy, stanch believer .

Oh yc wha leave the springs o' Calvin ,
 For gumlie dubs of your ain delvin' ! muddy
 Ye sons of heresy and error ,
 Ye 'll some day squeel in quaking terror !

When Vengeance draws the sword in wrath,
And in the fire throws the sheath ;
When Ruin, with his sweeping besom,
Just frets, till Heaven commission gies him :
While o'er the harp pale Misery moans,
And strikes the ever-deepening tones,
Still louder shrieks, and heavier groans !

Your pardon, sir, for this digression,
I maist forgot my dedication ;
But when divinity comes 'cross me,
My readers still are sure to lose me.

So, sir, ye see 'twas nae daft vapour,
But I maturely thought it proper,
When a' my works I did review,
To dedicate them, sir, to you :
Because (ye need na tak it ill)
I thought them something like yoursel'.

Then patronise them wi' your favour,
And your petitioner shall ever—
I had amaist said, ever pray,
But that's a word I need na say :
For prayin' I hae little skill o't ;
I'm baith dead swear, and wretched ill o't ;
But I'se repeat each poor man's prayer
That kens or hears about you, sir—

unwilling

' May ne'er Misfortune's gowling bark
Howl through the dwelling o' the Clerk !¹
May ne'er his generous, honest heart,
For that same generous spirit smart !
May Kennedy's far-honoured name
Lang beat his hymeneal flame,
Till Hamiltons, at least a dozen,
Are by their caunt fireside risen :
Five bonny lasses round their table,
And seven braw fellows, stout and able,
To serve their king and country weel,
By word, or pen, or pointed steel !
May health and peace, with mutual rays,
Shine on the evening o' his days,
Till his wee curlie John's ier-oe,
When ebbing life nae mair shall flow,
The last, sad mournful rites bestow.'

great-grandchild

¹ A sobriquet for Mr Hamilton, probably because of his acting in this capacity to some of the county courts.

I will not wind a lang conclusion
 With complimentary effusion :
 But whilst your wishes and endeavours
 Are blest wi' fortune's smiles and favours,
 I am, dear sir, with zeal most fervent,
 Your much indebted, humble servant.

But if (which powers above prevent !)
 That iron-hearted carl, Want,
 Attended in his grim advances
 By sad mistakes and blaek mischances,
 While hopes, and joys, and pleasures fly him,
 Make you as poor a dog as I am,
 Your humble servant then no more ;
 For who would humbly serve the poor ?
 But by a poor man's hopes in Heaven !
 While recollection's power is given,
 If, in the vale of humble life,
 The victim sad of fortune's strife,
 I, through the tender-gushing tear,
 Should recognise my master dear,
 If friendless, low, we meet together,
 Then, sir, your hand—my friend and brother !

Amongst other productions at this crisis, was a

FAREWELL TO THE BRETHREN OF ST JAMES'S LODGE, TORBOLTON.

TUNE—*Good-night, and Joy be wi' you a'*.

Adieu ! a heart-warm, fond adieu !
 Dear brothers of the *mystic tie* !
 Ye favoured, ye *enlightened* few,
 Companions of my social joy ;
 Though I to foreign lands must hie,
 Pursuing Fortune's slidd'ry ba',
 With melting heart, and brimful eye,
 I'll mind you still, though far awa'.

Oft have I met your social band,
 And spent the cheerful, festive night ;
 Oft, honoured with supreme command,
 Presided o'er the *Sons of Light* :
 And by that *hieroglyphic* bright
 Which none but *Craftsmen* ever saw !
 Strong Memory on my heart shall write
 Those happy scenes when far awa'.

May Freedom, Harmony, and Love,
 Unite you in the *grand design*,
 Beneath the Omniscient Eye above,
 The glorious Architect Divine !
 That you may keep the *unerring line*,
 Still rising by the *plummet's law*,
 Till Order bright completely shine,
 Shall be my prayer when far awa'.

And *you*, farewell ! whose merits claim,
 Justly, that *highest badge* to wear !
 Heaven bless your honoured, noble name,
 To *masonry* and *Scotia* dear !
 A last request permit me here,
 When yearly ye assemble a',
 One round—I ask it with a *tear*—
 To him, *the Bard that's far awa'*.

The person alluded to in the last stanza was Major-general James Montgomery (a younger brother of Hugh Montgomery of Coilsfield), who now enjoyed the dignity of the worshipful Grand Master in this village lodge, while Robert Burns was Depute Master. The ardour of the poet in free-masonry was one of his most conspicuous passions. It seems almost incomprehensible that a mind like his could delight to associate with a set of men so different from himself as the ordinary trades-people of Torbolton, amongst whom probably Dr Hornbook shone as a man of learning and profound sagacity. Yet so it was.

It has been mentioned that he was nominated as Depute Master in July 1784. In the crumbling record of the lodge, he appears as re-elected in July 1785. In this capacity he signs minutes on the 29th June, the 20th July, the 2d and 18th August, the 15th September, the 26th October, the 10th November, the 1st and 7th December, the 7th January 1786, and the 1st March, when his brother Gilbert is entered ‘passed and raised.’ Apparently during all this time, though living several miles from the village, he had never missed attendance on one of the meetings of the lodge. On several occasions he held subordinate lodges at Mauchline, thus doing the utmost he could to propagate the masonic faith. One of these meetings took place on the 25th May, being eleven days subsequent to the assumed date of the parting with Highland Mary. From the 1st of March, about which time the distressing affair connected with the *Lament* began to harass him, his attendance on the Torbolton lodge was irregular. Dr Hornbook

on one occasion acts as his deputy. His signature appears, however, at the minutes of 7th and 15th June. On the latter occasion there is a curious entry: ‘It was proposed by the lodge, that as they much wanted a lodge-room, a proposal be laid before the heritors who are intending to build a steeple here, that the lodge will contribute to the building of *a lodge-room as the basis of that steeple*, and that from the funds of the lodge they offer fifteen pounds, besides what will be advanced from the particular friends of the lodge; in order that this proposal be properly laid before the heritors, five persons—namely, the Right Worshipful Master, Brother M’Math, *Brother Burns*, Brother Wodrow, Brother William Andrew—are appointed to meet on Saturday at one o’clock, to draw up a proposal to lay before the heritors on Friday first.’ It is odd to find Burns concerned in a movement to get a mason lodge introduced into a portion of a parish church.

The St James’s Lodge at this time met in a small stifling back-room connected with the inn of the village—a humble cottage-like place of entertainment kept by one Manson. On the approach of St John’s Day, the 24th of June, when a procession of the lodge was contemplated, Burns sent a rhymed note on the subject to his medical friend Mr Mackenzie, with whom, it may be explained, he had lately had some controversy on the origin of morals:—

Friday first’s the day appointed
By the Right Worshipful anointed,
To hold our grand procession ;
To get a blad o’ Johnnie’s morals,
And taste a swatch o’ Manson’s barrels
I’ the way of our profession.
The Master and the Brotherhood
Would a’ be glad to see you ;
For me I would be mair than proud
To sharc the mercies wi’ you.
If Death, then, wi’ skaith, then,
Some mortal heart is hechtin’,
Inform him, and storm him,
That Saturday you’ll fecht him.

entertainment
hurt
threatening

ROBERT BURNS.

MOSSGIEL, An. M. 5790.

He was now commencing the printing of his poems, and striving by dissipation to drown the painful recollection of his Jean. His signature likewise appears at the minutes of 29th June, 18th August, 5th October, and 10th November. On some one of these occasions he took an actual farewell of the lodge, but a blithesome

one, probably in anticipation of his journey to Edinburgh. The book contains no notice of the circumstance; but it was faithfully remembered a few years ago by a surviving brother, named John Lees. John said that Burns came in a pair of buckskins, out of which he would always pull the other shilling for the other bowl, till it was five in the morning. ‘An awfu’ night that!’

It may be mentioned, in connection with the preceding paragraphs, that Burns joined on at least one occasion in the festivities of the Kilmarnock Lodge, presided over by his friend William Parker; on which occasion he produced an appropriate song:—

THE SONS OF OLD KILLIE.

TUNE—*Shawenboy.*

Ye sons of Old Killie, assembled by Willie,
To follow the noble vocation;
Your thrifty old mother has scarce such another
To sit in that honourèd station.
I’ve little to say, but only to pray,
As praying’s the ton of your fashion;
A prayer from the Muse you well may excuse,
’Tis seldom her favourite passion.

Ye powers who preside o’er the wind and the tide,
Who markèd each clement’s border;
Who formèd this frame with beneficent aim,
Whose sovereign statute is order;
Within this dear mansion may wayward Contention
Or witherèd Envy ne’er enter;
May Secrecy round be the mystical bound,
And Brotherly Love be the centre.

We thus see that in the midst of the labours of the press, and the vexations connected with Jean Armour, there were hours of mirth, and something beyond mirth. There were also hours of the finest poetical inspiration. The beautiful estate of Ballochmyle on the Ayr, near Mauchline, had recently been transferred from the Whitefoords to Mr Claud Alexander, a gentleman well connected in the west of Scotland, who had realised a large fortune as paymaster-general of the East India Company’s troops in Bengal. He had lately come to reside at the mansion-house. The steep banks of the river at this place form a scene of natural loveliness which has few matches, and Burns loved to wander there. In an evening of early summer, Miss Wilhelmina Alexander, the sister of the new

laird, walking out along the braes after dinner, encountered a plain-looking man in rustic attire, who appeared to be musing, with his shoulder leaning against a tree. According to her own account: ‘The grounds being forbidden to unauthorised strangers—the evening being far advanced, and the encounter very sudden—she was startled, but instantly recovered herself, and passed on.’ When Burns wrote to the lady some months afterwards, he gave his own account of the rencontre:—‘I had roved out,’ he says, ‘as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my Muse, on the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed, who, regardless of your harmonious endeavours to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you—your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn-twigs that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene, and such the hour, when, in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the fairest pieces of nature’s workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape, or met a poet’s eye; those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce with aerial beings! Had Calumny and Villainy taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

‘What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain, dull, historic prose into metaphor and measure.’

He then added, that during his walk homeward he composed a song descriptive of the scene and the meeting:—

THE BONNIE LASS O' BALLOCHMYLE.

‘Twas even—the dewy fields were green,
On every blade the pearls hang!¹
The Zephyr wantoned round the bean,
And bore its fragrant sweets alang;

¹ *Hang*, Scotticism for *hung*.

In every glen the mavis sang,
 All nature listening seemed the while,
 Except where greenwood echoes rang,
 Amang the braes o' Ballochmyle.

With careless step I onward strayed,
 My heart rejoiced in Nature's joy,
 When, musing in a lonely glade,
 A maiden fair I chanced to spy ;
 Her look was like the morning's eye,
 Her air like Nature's vernal smile,
 Perfection whispered passing by,
 Behold the lass o' Ballochmyle !¹

Fair is the morn in flowery May,
 And sweet is night in Autumn mild ;
 When roving through the garden gay,
 Or wandering in the lonely wild :
 But woman, Nature's darling child !
 There all her charms she does compile ;
 Even there her other works are foiled
 By the bonnie lass o' Ballochmyle.

Oh had she been a country maid,
 And I the happy country swain !
 Though sheltered in the lowest shed
 That ever rose on Scotland's plain,
 Through weary winter's wind and rain,
 With joy, with rapture, I would toil ;
 And nightly to my bosom strain
 The bonnie lass o' Ballochmyle.

Then pride might climb the slippery steep,
 Where fame and honours lofty shine ;
 And thirst of gold might tempt the deep,
 Or downward seek the Indian mine ;
 Give me the cot below the pine,
 To tend the flocks, or till the soil,
 And every day has joys divine
 With the bonnie lass o' Ballochmyle.

It was in the subsequent November that Burns addressed Miss Alexander, his object being, as stated at the close of the letter, to obtain her consent to the publication of the song, which he enclosed. To his mortification, the lady took no notice of either letter or song. Dr Currie says: ‘ Her modesty might prevent her

¹ Variation—

The lily's hue and rose's dye
 Bespoke the lass o' Ballochmyle.

from perceiving that the Muse of Tibullus breathed in this nameless poet, and that her beauty was awakening strains destined to immortality on the banks of the Ayr. It may be conceived also, that, supposing the verse duly appreciated, delicacy might find it difficult to express its acknowledgments.¹

The apology now presented by the family for Miss Alexander's conduct is, that, on inquiring regarding the person who had addressed her, she unfortunately fell amongst those who entertained an unfavourable opinion of his character. Feeling it to be necessary to decline yielding to his request, she thought that that resolution would be intimated most delicately towards him, as well as in the manner most agreeable to herself, by simply allowing the letter to remain unanswered. It is easy to enter into the feelings of a sensible woman of thirty in adopting this course, and even to make some allowance for others not acknowledged, which might cause her to shrink from the acquaintance of a humble tenant of her brother—for Mossiel now belonged to Mr Alexander—who, in the exercise of an assumed poetic privilege, dared to imagine her as his mistress. However this might be, Miss Alexander and her kindred learned afterwards to think the woods of Ballochmyle classic, and herself immortal, through the genius of Burns. On a question occurring many years after as to the disposal of the original manuscript of the song, Miss Alexander said that there could be no dispute on that point: wherever she went, it must go. The late Mr Alexander, her nephew, erected a bower or rustic seat on the spot where she had met the bard; and for the decoration of this retreat, a fac-simile of the song and letter was affixed in a suitable framing.¹

The conduct of Jean Armour and her parents had inspired in Burns and all his own relatives a feeling of deep resentment. In the arrangement of his desperate affairs, preparatory to leaving Scotland, he did not feel called upon to make any provision in favour of a family which had contumeliously refused what was the highest justice both to them and to himself. It began to be whispered about Mauchline, that Mr Armour was contemplating legal measures to obtain a guarantee from the poet for the

¹ Dr Currie, by omitting the final sentence of the letter, concealed its immediate object, and he did not state or suggest the family account of Miss Alexander's silence. This is now given from the information of the late amiable Mrs Alexander of Ballochmyle, communicated to me at Ballochmyle in 1837, in the next room to that in which, a few minutes before, I had had the pleasure of lunching with the Bonnie Lass herself, then a fine-looking old lady of cheerful manners and demeanour. She died unmarried in 1843, aged eighty-eight.

support of his expected progeny. Hearing of this, and dreading that the ultimate issue of such procedure would be a jail, Burns left his home, and was for some time lost to the observation of the Mauchline world. He had an aunt named Allan, living at Old Rome Forest, near Kilmarnock, where he had spent many days of late, in order to be near the press of John Wilson. To this place he conveyed a large chest, containing the articles required for his voyage and colonial outfit. Here also he now took up his abode, though not regularly, in order to be out of the way of legal diligence.

TO MR JOHN RICHMOND.

OLD ROME FOREST, 30th July 1786.

MY DEAR RICHMOND—My hour is now come—you and I will never meet in Britain more. I have orders, within three weeks at furthest, to repair aboard the *Nancy*, Captain Smith, from Clyde to Jamaica, and to call at Antigua. This, except to our friend Smith, whom God long preserve, is a secret about Mauchline. Would you believe it? Armour has got a warrant to throw me in jail till I find security for an enormous sum. This they keep an entire secret, but I got it by a channel they little dream of; and I am wandering from one friend's house to another, and, like a true son of the gospel, 'have nowhere to lay my head.' I know you will pour an execration on her head, but spare the poor, ill-advised girl, for my sake. * * * I write in a moment of rage, reflecting on my miserable situation—exiled, abandoned, forlorn. I can write no more; let me hear from you by the return of coach. I will write you ere I go. I am, dear sir, yours, here and hereafter,

R. B.

Follows another letter, probably written about the second week of August:—

TO MONS. JAMES SMITH, MAUCHLINE.

Monday Morning, Mossiel.

MY DEAR SIR—I went to Dr Douglas yesterday, fully resolved to take the opportunity of Captain Smith; but I found the doctor with a Mr and Mrs White, both Jamaicans, and they have deranged my plans altogether. They assure him that to send me from Savannah la Mar to Port Antonio, will cost my master, Charles Douglas, upwards of fifty pounds, besides running the risk of throwing myself into a pleuritic fever, in consequence of hard travelling in the sun. On these accounts he refuses sending me with Smith; but a vessel sails from Greenock the 1st of September, right for the place of my destination. The captain of her is an intimate friend of Mr Gavin

Hamilton's, and as good a fellow as heart could wish : with him I am destined to go. Where I shall shelter I know not, but I hope to weather the storm. * * *

On Thursday morning, if you can muster as much self-denial as to be out of bed about seven o'clock, I shall see you as I ride through to Cumnock. After all, Heaven bless the sex ! I feel there is still happiness for me among them :

Oh, woman, lovely woman ! Heaven designed you
To temper man !—we had been brutes without you !

R. B.

It was in this extraordinary climax of circumstances—his mistress's father pursuing him at law, in order to extort from him the money received for his poems ; himself skulking to preserve his liberty, that he might be enabled to embrace a miserable course of life offered to him in Jamaica—that Burns brought forth his wondrous volume. How impressively do the circumstances seem to verify the remark, that effusions of great genius ever tend to a connection with heart-break and humiliation ! There is but one relieving fact—that the merits of the poor peasant of Mossiel, and his generous social character, had, in spite of every drawback in his own follies, or rather sins, raised for him the friendship of many worthy people of his neighbourhood. Hamilton of Mauchline, Aiken and Ballantyne of Ayr, Muir and Parker of Kilmarnock, had all acted like true-hearted kindly men in giving and obtaining patronage to the poet. The last-mentioned person had put down his name for thirty-five copies. The volume appeared at the end of July, with the simple title, *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, by Robert Burns*, and the motto :

‘ The Simple Bard, unbroke to rules of art,
He pours the wild effusions of the heart.
And if inspired, ’tis Nature’s powers inspire ;
Hers all the melting thrill, and hers the kindling fire.’

ANONYMOUS.

It contained the following pieces :—The Twa Dogs—Scotch Drink—The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer—The Holy Fair—Address to the Deil—Mailie—To J. S**** [Smith]—A Dream—The Vision—Halloween—The Auld Farmer's New-year Morning's Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie—The Cotter's Saturday Night—To a Mouse—Epistle to Davie—The Lament—Despondency, an Ode—Man was Made to Mourn—Winter, a Dirge—A Prayer in the Prospect of Death—To a Mountain Daisy—To Ruin—Epistle to a Young Friend—On a Scotch Bard gone to the West Indies—

A Dedication to G**** H******, Esq.—To a Louse—Epistle to J. L******, an old Scots Bard—To the Same—Epistle to W. S******, Ochiltree—Epistle to J. R*****—Song, ‘It was upon a Lammas Night’—Song, ‘Now Westlin’ Winds’—Song, ‘From thee, Eliza, I must go’—The Farewell to the Brethren of St James’s Lodge, Torbolton—Epitaphs and Epigrams—A Bard’s Epitaph.

It was introduced by the following preface :—

‘The following trifles are not the production of the poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and perhaps amid the elegances and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocritus or Virgil. To the author of this, these and other celebrated names, their countrymen, are, in their original languages, *a fountain shut up, and a book sealed*. Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him in his and their native language. Though a rhymer from his earliest years, at least from the earliest impulses of the softer passions, it was not till very lately that the applause, perhaps the partiality, of friendship, wakened his vanity so far as to make him think anything of his worth shewing; and none of the following works were ever composed with a view to the press. To amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a laborious life; to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears, in his own breast; to find some kind of counterpoise to the struggles of a world, always an alien scene, a task uncouth to the poetical mind—these were his motives for courting the Muses, and in these he found poetry to be its own reward.

‘Now that he appears in the public character of an author, he does it with fear and trembling. So dear is fame to the rhyming tribe, that even he, an obscure, nameless bard, shrinks aglair at the thought of being branded as—an impudent blockhead, obtruding his nonsense on the world; and because he can make a shift to jingle a few doggerel Scotch rhymes together, looks upon himself as a poet of no small consequence forsooth !

‘It is an observation of that celebrated poet,¹ whose divine elegies do honour to our language, our nation, and our species, that “*Humility* has depressed many a genius to a hermit, but never raised one to fame!” If any critic catches at the word *genius*, the author tells him, once for all, that he certainly looks upon himself as possessed of some poetic abilities, otherwise his publishing in the manner he has done would be a manœuvre below the worst character which, he hopes, his worst enemy will ever give him. But to the genius of a Ramsay, or the glorious dawnings of the

¹ Shenstone.

poor, unfortunate Fergusson, he, with equal unaffected sincerity, declares that, even in his highest pulse of vanity, he has not the most distant pretensions. These two justly admired Scotch poets he has often had in his eye in the following pieces, but rather with a view to kindle at their flame than for servile imitation.

'To his subscribers, the author returns his most sincere thanks. Not the mercenary bow over a counter, but the heart-throbbing gratitude of the bard, conscious how much he owes to benevolence and friendship for gratifying him, if he deserves it, in that dearest wish of every poetic bosom—to be distinguished. He begs his readers, particularly the learned and the polite, who may honour him with a perusal, that they will make every allowance for education and circumstances of life; but if, after a fair, candid, and impartial criticism, he shall stand convicted of dulness and nonsense, let him be done by as he would in that case do by others—let him be condemned, without mercy, to contempt and oblivion.'

He plainly announces here the consciousness of possessing some degree of ability. He told Dr Moore, a twelvemonth after, that he was pretty confident his poems would meet with some applause. I must own that there is something satisfactory in knowing that Burns perceived the superiority of his verses before the world had put its stamp upon them. It would have told as a blindness derogatory to the powers of his mind if he had not. Still, the great tribunal was to be passed, and he was justified in regarding its decision as doubtful. It was not long so, as far as Ayrshire and the adjacent districts were concerned. Robert Heron, then a young literary aspirant residing in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, relates that by old and young the volume of Burns's poems was everywhere received with delight and admiration. He himself got the book into his hands at night, and he slept not till he had read it through. 'Even ploughboys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages they earned most hardly, and which they required to purchase necessary clothing, if they might but procure the works of Burns.' The edition had been one of 600 copies, for 350 of which subscribers had been obtained before publication. It appears that there had been an immediate sale beyond that list, for in little more than two months a reprint was under discussion, and the impression thought of was 1000. The speculation, when all expenses were cleared, left about twenty pounds in Burns's pocket.¹

¹ See Appendix, No. 10.

TO MR JOHN KENNEDY.

KILMARNOCK [between 3d and 16th August], 1786.

MY DEAR SIR—Your truly facetious epistle of the 3d instant gave me much entertainment. I was only sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing you as I passed your way, but we shall bring up all our lee-way on Wednesday the 16th current, when I hope to have it in my power to call on you, and take a kind, very probably a last adieu, before I go for Jamaica ; and I expect orders to repair to Greenock every day. I have at last made my public appearance, and am solemnly inaugurated into the numerous class. Could I have got a carrier, you should have had a score of vouchers for my authorship ; but, now you have them, let them speak for themselves.

Farewell, dear friend ! may guid-luck hit you,
 And 'mang her favourites admit you,
 If e'er Detraction shore to smit you,
 May nane believe him,
 And ony deil that thinks to get you,
 Good L—, deceive him.

threaten

R. B.

THE FAREWELL.

'The valiant, in himself, what can he suffer ?
 Or what does he regard his single woes ?
 But when, alas ! he multiplies himself,
 To dearer selves, to the loved tender fair,
 To those whose bliss, whose being hangs upon him,
 To helpless children !—then, oh then ! he feels
 The point of misery festering in his heart,
 And weakly weeps his fortune like a coward.
 Such, such am I ! undone !'

THOMSON'S *Edward and Eleanora*.

Farewell, old Scotia's bleak domains,
 Far dearer than the torrid plains
 Where rich ananas blow !
 Farewell, a mother's blessing dear !
 A brother's sigh ! a sister's tear !
 My Jean's heart-rending throe !
 Farewell, my Bess ! though thou 'rt bereft
 Of my parental eare,
 A faithful brother I have left,
 My part in him thou 'lt share !
 Adieu too, to you too,
 My Smith, my bosom frien' ;
 When kindly you mind me,
 Oh then befriend my Jean !

What bursting anguish tears my heart !
From thee, my Jeanie, must I part ?
Thou, weeping, answ'rest 'No !'
Alas ! misfortune stares my face,
And points to ruin and disgrace,
I for thy sake must go !
Thee, Hamilton, and Aiken dear,
A grateful, warm adieu !
I, with a much-indebted tear,
Shall still remember you !
All-hail then, the gale then,
Wafts me from thee, dear shore !
It rustles, and whistles—
I'll never see thee more !

LINES WRITTEN ON A BANK-NOTE.¹

Wae worth thy power, thou cursed leaf,
Fell source o' a' my wo and grief:
For lack o' thee I 've lost my lass,
For lack o' thee I scrimp my glass ; stint
I see the children of affliction
Unaided, through thy cursed restriction.
I 've seen the oppressor's cruel smile
Amid his hapless victim's spoil,
And, for thy potence, vainly wished
To crush the villain in the dust.
For lack o' thee I leave this much-loved shore,
Never perhaps to greet old Scotland more.

R. B.—Kvle.

WRITTEN

ON A BLANK LEAF OF A COPY OF THE POEMS, PRESENTED TO AN OLD
SWEETHEART,² THEN MARRIED.

Once fondly loved, and still remembered dear :
Sweet early object of my youthful vows !
Accept this mark of friendship, warm, sincere—
Friendship ! 'tis all cold duty now allows.

And when you read the simple artless rhymes,
One friendly sigh for him—he asks no more,
Who distant burns in flaming torrid climes,
Or haply lies beneath th' Atlantic's roar.

¹ 'The above verses, in the handwriting of Burns, are copied from a bank-note, in the possession of Mr James F. Gracie of Dumfries. The note is of the Bank of Scotland, and is dated so far back as 1st March 1780.'—MOTIERWELL.

² According to Dr Currie, this old sweetheart was the *fillette* whom the poet had seen at Kirkoswald, when he was attending school there. If so, she was a Mrs Neilson, living in Ayr.

VERSES WRITTEN UNDER VIOLENT GRIEF.¹

Accept the gift a friend sincere
 Wad on thy worth be pressin' ;
 Remembrance oft may start a tear,
 But oh ! that tenderness forbear,
 Though 'twad my sorrows lessen.

My morning raise sae clear and fair,
 I thought sair storms wad never
 Bedew the scene ; but grief and care
 In wildest fury hae made bare
 My peace, my hope, for ever !

You think I 'm glad ; oh, I pay weel
 For a' the joy I borrow,
 In solitude—then, then I feel
 I canna to mysel' conceal
 My deeply-ranklin' sorrow.

Farewell ! within thy bosom free
 A sigh may whiles awaken ;
 A tear may wet thy laughin' e'e,
 For Scotia's son—ance gay like thee—
 Now hopeless, comfortless, forsaken !

Burns had made an engagement with Mr Charles Douglas of Port Antonio, to act as book-keeper or assistant-overseer on his estate for three years, at thirty pounds a year. Mr John Hutchinson, a correspondent of the bard at St Ann's, Jamaica, afterwards congratulated him on being saved from going there, 'as,' says he, 'I have great reason to believe that Mr Douglas's employ would by no means have answered your expectations.'² So humble and so doubtful was the alternative to which the wretchedness of his position at home had reduced him. It was even feared by the bard that poverty would oblige him to 'indent himself'—by which we presume is meant, become bound as apprentices are—in order that Mr Douglas might pay his passage to the West Indies. From this last humiliation he was only saved by the success of his volume. As soon as he was master of nine guineas, he took a steerage-passage in a vessel which was expected to sail from Greenock at the beginning of September.

¹ These verses were probably written, like the preceding, on a copy of the volume of poems. They were first published in the *Sun* newspaper, April 1823.

² Currie's edition of Burns, General Correspondence, No. xxxii.

During August, the poet seems to have been busied chiefly in collecting the money due for his poems. In all the principal towns of his own district, he had friends who had exerted themselves in procuring subscribers, and who were now drawing money on his behalf. His friend Aiken had been the medium for distributing no fewer than a hundred and forty-five copies, being nearly a fourth of the whole impression. In the course of his rounds, Burns came to Maybole, where his Kirkoswald friend 'Willie' had been doing what he could for the sale of the book. The bard was in the highest spirits, for, as he acknowledged, he had never before been in possession of so much ready cash. Willie assembled a few choice spirits at the King's Arms, to do honour to the bard; and they spent a happy night together, Burns being, as usual, the life and soul of the party. He had, as we know, heavy griefs hanging at his heart; but amongst genial men, over a glass of Scotch drink, no pain could long molest him. Comic verses flashed from his mouth *al improvviso*, to the astonishment of the company, all of whom felt that a paragon of mirthful genius had come before them. In the pride of his heart next morning, he determined on hiring from his host a certain poor hack mare, well known along the whole road from Glasgow to Port Patrick as a beast that could now do little better (to use his own words) than

— ‘hoyte and hoble,
And wintle like a sawmont coble.’

Willie and a few others of his Maybole friends walked out of town before him, for the purpose of taking leave at a particular spot; and before he came up, they had, by way of keeping up the style of the preceding evening, prepared a few mock heroies in which to bid him speed on his journey. Burns received their salute with a subdued merriment; and when their spokesman had done, broke out with: 'What need of all this fine parade of verse, my friends? It would have been quite enough if you had said just this—

Here comes Burns
On Rosinante;
She's d—— poor,
But he's d—— canty!'

And then he went on his way. Is it not pleasant, even in so trivial an anecdote as this, to catch a glimpse of the poet in those holiday moments of the spirit which streaked fitfully this period of gloom allied to despair?¹

¹ See Appendix, No. 10.

After a few weeks, when the admiration everywhere expressed for the Poems began to throw a lustre on the name of Burns, and to point his way to a better fate, his mistress's father ceased to give him any reason for fear regarding his personal liberty. He was living quietly at Mossgiel when, on a Sunday evening, 3d September, a brother of his mistress came out to tell him that Jean had proved the mother of twins, and to consult about the baptism of the infants. It was agreed that the Mossgiel family should take charge of the one, a boy, while the mother's friends should retain the other, a girl, who, however, did not long survive. With this arrangement ended the circumstances immediately connected with the irregular union of Burns and Jean Armour—a most sad example of the legalised indecorum called a Scotch marriage, followed by the grosser outrage of a divorce dictated by the arbitrary will of a third party, and effected by the simple burning of a piece of paper. What is strangest of all, though the fact was not suspected by any of the parties, there is now reason to believe that the marriage never was legally annulled; and that, consequently, these infants were legitimate in all but popular acceptation.

TO MR ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

Mossgiel, Friday Morning [Sept. ? 1786.]

MY FRIEND, MY BROTHER—Warm recollection of an absent friend presses so hard upon my heart, that I send him the prefixed bagatelle, pleased with the thought that it will greet the man of my bosom, and be a kind of distant language of friendship.

You will have heard that poor Armour has repaid me double. A very fine boy and a girl have awakened a thought and feelings that thrill, some with tender pleasure, and some with forboding anguish, through my soul.

The poem was nearly an extemporaneous production, on a wager with Mr Hamilton that I would not produce a poem on the subject in a given time.

If you think it worth while, read it to Charles and Mr W. Parker; and if they choose a copy of it, it is at their service, as they are men whose friendship I shall be proud to claim, both in this world and that which is to come.

I believe all hopes of staying at home will be abortive; but more of this when, in the latter part of next week, you shall be troubled with a visit from, my dear sir, your most devoted,

R. B.

The bagatelle was the following well-known piece :—

T H E C A L F.

TO THE REV. MR JAMES STEVEN,¹

On his Text, *Malachi*, iv. 2.—⁴ And ye shall go forth, and grow up as CALVES of the stall.'

Right, sir ! your text I 'll prove it true,
Though heretics may laugh ;
For instance, there 's yoursel' just now,
God knows, an unco calf!

And should some patron be so kind,
As bless you wi' a kirk,
I doubt na, sir, but then we 'll find
Ye 're still as great a stirk.

But if the lover's raptured hour
Shall ever be your lot,
Forbid it, every heavenly power,
You e'er should be a stot !

Though, when some kind, connubial dear,
Your but-and-ben adorns,
The like has been that you may wear
A noble head of horns.

And in your lug, most reverend James,
To hear you roar and rowte,
Few men o' sense will doubt your claims
To rank amang the nowte.

bellow

cattle

And when ye 're numbered wi' the dead,
Below a grassy hillock,
Wi' justice they may mark your head—
‘ Here lies a famous bullock ! ’

To this period are to be referred a few stray pieces. Mr William Chalmers, writer in Ayr, who had drawn up an assignation of the bard's property, was in love, and it occurred to him to ask Burns to address the admired object in his behalf. The poet, who had

¹ Afterwards minister of one of the Scotch churches in London, and ultimately of Kilwinning, in Ayrshire. The tradition in the family of Mr Gavin Hamilton is, that the poet, in passing to the church at Mauchline, called at Mr Hamilton's, who, being confined with the gout, could not accompany him, but desired him, as parents do with children, to bring home a note of the text. At the conclusion of the service, Burns called again, and sitting down for a minute at Mr Hamilton's business-table, scribbled these verses, by way of a compliance with the request. From a memorandum by Burns himself, it would appear that there was also a wager with Mr Hamilton as to his producing a poem in a certain time, and that he gained it by inditing *The Calf*.

seen the lady, but was scarcely acquainted with her, readily complied by producing the following specimen of vicarious courtship :—

WILLIE CHALMERS.

Wi' braw new branks in mickle pride,
And eke a braw new brechan,
My Pegasus I'm got astride,
And up Parnassus pechin';
Whiles owre a bush wi' downward crush,
The doited beastie stammers;
Then up he gets, and off he sets
For sake o' Willie Chalmers.

bridle
collar
panting
stupid

I doubt na, lass, that weel-kenned name
May cost a pair o' blushes;
I am nae stranger to your fame,
Nor his warm urgèd wishes.
Your bonny face sae mild and sweet,
His honest heart enamours,
And faith ye'll no be lost a whit,
Though waired on Willie Chalmers.

spent

Auld Truth hersel' might swear ye're fair,
And Honour safely back her,
And Modesty assume your air,
And nc'er a ane mistak' her:
And sic twa love-inspiring een
Might fire even holy palmers;
Nae wonder, then, they've fatal been
To honest Willie Chalmers.

I doubt na fortune may you shore
Some mim-mou'd pouthered priestie,
Fu' lifted up wi' Hebrew lore,
And band upon his breastie:
But oh! what signifies to you
His lexicons and grammars;
The feeling heart's the royal blue,
And that's wi' Willie Chalmers.

promise
prim

Some gapin' glowrin' country laird
May warsle for your favour;
May claw his lug, and straik his beard,
And hoast up some palaver.
My bonny maid, before ye wed
Sic clumsy-witted hammers,
Seek Heaven for help, and barefit skelp
Awa' wi' Willie Chalmers.

ear
cough

Forgive the Bard ! my fond regard
 For aye that shares my bosom,
 Inspires my Muse to gie 'm his dues,
 For deil a hair I roose him.
 May powers aboon unite you soon,
 And fructify your amours,
 And every year come in mair dear
 To you and Willie Chalmers.

flatter

TAM SAMSON'S ELEGY.¹

' An honest man's the noblest work of God.'—POPE.

Has auld Kilmarnock seen the deil ?
 Or great M'Kinlay² thrawn his heel ?
 Or Robertson³ again grown weel
 To preach and read ?⁴
 ' Na, waur than a ! ' cries ilk a chiel—
 Tam Samson's dead !

Kilmarnock lang may grunt and grane,
 And sigh, and sob, and greet her lane,
 And cleed her bairns, man, wife, and wean,
 In mourning weed ;
 To Death she's dearly paid the kane—
 Tam Samson's dead !

The brethren o' the mystic level
 May hing their head in woefu' bevel,
 While by their nose the tears will revel,
 Like ony bead ;
 Death's gien the lodge an unco devel—
 Tam Samson's dead !

blow

When Winter muffles up his cloak,
 And binds the mire like a rock ;
 When to the loch the curlers flock
 Wi' gleesome speed,
 Wha will they station at the cock ?—
 Tam Samson's dead !

¹ Thomas Samson was one of the poet's Kilmarnock friends—a nursery and seedsman of good credit, a zealous sportsman, and a good fellow.

² A preacher, a great favourite with the million. See *The Ordination*, stanza ii.—B.

³ Another preacher, an equal favourite with the few, who was at that time ailing. For him also see *The Ordination*, stanza ix.—B.

⁴ For a minister to read his sermons, as is often done by those of moderate denomination, is often a cause of great unpopularity in Scotland.

He was the king o' a' the core,
 To guard, or draw, or wick a bore,
 Or up the rink like Jehu roar
 In time o' need ;
 But now he lags on Death's hog-score—
 Tam Samson's dead !¹

Now safe the stately sawmont sail,
 And trouts be-dropped wi' crimson hail,
 And eels weel kenned for souple tail,
 And geds for greed,
 Since dark in Death's fish-creel we wail
 Tam Samson dead !

Rejoice, ye birring paitricks a' ;
 Ye cootie² moorcocks crouslly craw ;
 Ye maukins, cock your fud fu' braw, hares
 Withouten dread ;
 Your mortal fae is now awa'—
 Tam Samson's dead !

That woefu' morn be ever mourned
 Saw him in shootin' graith adorned,
 While pointers round impatient burned,
 Frae couples freed ;
 But, och ! he gaed, and ne'er returned !—
 Tam Samson's dead !

In vain auld age his body batters ;
 In vain the gout his ankles fetters ;
 In vain the burns cam' down like waters
 An acre braid !
 Now every auld wife, greetin', clatters weeping
 Tam Samson's dead !

Owre many a weary hag he limpit,
 And aye the tither shot he thumpit,
 Till coward Death behind him jumpit,
 Wi' deadly feide ;
 Now he proclaims, wi' tout o' trumpet,
 Tam Samson's dead !

When at his heart he felt the dagger,
 He reeled his wonted bottle-swagger,

¹ In this verse are several terms of the curler's art. The *hog-score* is a line crossing the course, near its extremity: a stone which does not pass it is held as disgraced, and is set aside.

² A term applied to those fowls whose legs are clad with feathers.—JAMIESON.

But yet he drew the mortal trigger
 Wi' weel-aimed heed;
 'L—, five!' he cried, and owre did stagger—
 Tam Samson's dead !

Ilk hoary hunter mourned a brither ;
 Ilk sportsman youth bemoaned a father ;
 Yon auld gray stane, amang the heather,
 Marks out his head,
 Where Burns has wrote, in rhyming blether,
 Tam Samson's dead !

There low he lies, in lasting rest ;
 Perhaps upon his mouldering breast
 Some spitefu' muirfowl bigs her nest,
 To hatch and breed ;
 Alas ! nac mair he'll them molest !—
 Tam Samson's dead !

When August winds the heather wave,
 And sportsmen wander by yon grave,
 Three volleys let his memory crave
 O' pouther and lead,
 Till Echo answer frae her cave,
 Tam Samson's dead !

Heaven rest his saul, where'er he be !
 Is th' wish o' monie mae than me ;
 He had twa faults, or maybe three,
 Yet what remead ?
 Ae social, honest man want we :
 Tam Samson's dead !

EPI TAP II.

Tam Samson's weel-worn clay here lies,
 Ye canting zealots spare him ;
 If honest worth in heaven rise,
 Ye'll mend or ye win near him.

PER CONTRA.

Go, Fame, and canter like a fillie
 Through a' the streets and neuks o' Killie,¹
 Tell every social, honest billie
 To cease his grievin',
 For yet, unskaithed by Death's gleg gullie, sharp knife
 Tam Samson's leevin' !²

¹ Killie is a phrase the country-folks sometimes use for Kilmarnock.—*B.*

² When this worthy old sportsman went out last muirfowl season, he supposed it was to be,

The poet's cousin and correspondent at Montrose had heard of his design to leave Scotland, and sent to plead for a visit before he should depart.

TO MR BURNES, MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, September 26, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR—I this moment receive yours—receive it with the honest hospitable warmth of a friend's welcome. Whatever comes from you wakens always up the better blood about my heart, which your kind little recollections of my parental friends carries as far as

in Ossian's phrase, 'the last of his fields,' and expressed an ardent wish to die and be buried in the muirs. On this hint the author composed his elegy and epitaph.—*B.*

'The following anecdote was communicated by an intimate of Burns, the late William Parker, Esq. of Assloss, a gentleman whose excellent social qualities, and kind, hospitable disposition, will be long remembered in Ayrshire:—

'At a jovial meeting one evening in Kilmarnock, at which Burns, Mr Parker, and Mr Samson were present, the poet, after the glass had circulated pretty freely, said "He had indited a few lines, which, with the company's permission, he would read to them." The proposal was joyfully acceded to, and the poet immediately read aloud his inimitable *Tam Samson's Elegy*—

"Has auld Kilmarnock seen the deil?" &c.

The company was convulsed with laughter, with the exception of one individual—the subject, *videlicet*, of the verses. As the burden, "Tam Samson's dead," came round, Tam twisted and turned his body into all variety of postures, evidently not on a bed of roses. Burns saw the bait had taken, and fixing his keen black eye on his victim (Sir Walter Scott says that Burns had the finest eyes in his head he had ever seen in mortal), mercilessly pursued his sport with waggish glee. At last flesh and blood could stand it no longer. Tam, evidently anything but pleased, roared out vociferously: "Ou ay, but I'm no deid yet!" Shouts of laughter followed from the rest, and Burns continued to read, ever and anon interrupted with Tam's "Ay, but I'm no deid yet!" After he had finished, Burns took an opportunity of slipping out quietly, and returned in a few minutes with his well-known

"PER CONTRA."

Go, Fame, and canter like a fillie
Through a' the streets and neiks o' Killie;
Tell every social, honest billie
To cease his grievin',
For yet, unskaithed by Death's gleg gullie,
Tam Samson's leevin'."

We need not say that Tam was propitiated. Like the "humble auld beggar," in our humorous old Scotch ballad, "He helpit to drink his ain dregie," and the night was spent in the usual joyous manner where Burns was the presiding genius.—MERCATOR.' (From a Glasgow newspaper, Dec. 7, 1850.)

The monument of Samson, a plain slab at the west end of the church of Kilmarnock, contains the following inscription:—

"THOMAS SAMSON,
Died the 12th December 1795,
Aged 72 years."

Tam Samson's weel-worn clay here lies,
Ye canting zealots spare him;
If honest worth in heaven rise,
Ye'll mend or ye win near him.—BURNS.'

it will go. 'Tis there that man is blest ! 'Tis there, my friend, man feels a consciousness of something within him above the trodden clod ! The grateful reverence to the hoary (earthly) author of his being—the burning glow when he clasps the woman of his soul to his bosom—the tender yearnings of heart for the little angels to whom he has given existence—these nature has poured in milky streams about the human heart ; and the man who never rouses them to action, by the inspiring influences of their proper objects, loses by far the most pleasurable part of his existenee.

My departure is uneertain, but I do not think it will be till after harvest. I will be on very short allowance of time indeed, if I do not comply with your friendly invitation. When it will be, I don't know ; but if I can make my wish good, I will endeavour to drop you a line some time before. My best compliments to Mrs —— ; I should [be] equally mortified should I drop in when she is abroad ; but of that I suppose there is little chance.

What I have wrote, Heaven knows ; I have not time to review it : so accept of it in the beaten way of friendship. With the ordinary phrase—perhaps rather more than the ordinary sincrity—I am, dear sir, ever yours,

R. B.

Amongst men of some figure in the district who took notice of Burns in consequence of his publication, was Mr M'Adam of Craigengillan, as appears from a versified note of the bard :—

TO MR M'ADAM OF CRAIGENGILLAN.

Sir, o'er a gill I gat your card,
I trow it made me proud ;
' See wha takts notice o' the Bard !'
I lap and cried fu' loud.

Now diel-ma-care about their jaw,
The senseless, gawky million :
I 'll cock my nose aboon them a'—
I 'm roosed by Craigengillau !

praised

'Twas noble, sir ; 'twas like yoursel'
To grant your high protection :
A great man's smile, ye ken fu' well,
Is aye a blest infection ;—

Though, by his¹ banes who in a tub
Matched Macedonian Sandy !
On my ain legs through dirt and dub,
I independent stand aye.

¹ Diogenes.

And when those legs to guid, warm kail,
 Wi' welcome canna bear me ;
 A lee dike-side, a sybow-tail,
 And barley-scone, shall cheer me.

leck

Heaven spare you lang to kiss the breath
 O' many flowery simmers !
 And bless your bonny lasses baith—
 I'm tauld they're lo'esome kimmers !

girls

And God bless young Dunaskin's laird,
 The blossom of our gentry !
 And may he wear an auld man's beard,
 A credit to his country !

We are told by Gilbert Burns, that Sir William Cunningham of Robertland paid the bard some flattering attentions. It also appears that a lady whom he had approached in earlier days, when accompanying David Sillar to chat with the maidens in her hall, now renewed his acquaintance in a manner which he felt to be kind and considerate. He addressed her thus :—

TO MRS STEWART OF STAIR.

[August?] 1786.

MADAM—The hurry of my preparations for going abroad has hindered me from performing my promise so soon as I intended. I have here sent you a parcel of songs, &c., which never made their appearance, except to a friend or two at most. Perhaps some of them may be no great entertainment to you, but of that I am far from being an adequate judge. The song to the tune of Ettrick Banks [*The Bonnie Lass of Ballochmyle*] you will easily see the impropriety of exposing much, even in manuscript. I think myself it has some merit, both as a tolerable description of one of Nature's sweetest scenes, a July evening, and one of the finest pieces of Nature's workmanship, the finest, indeed, we know anything of—an amiable, beautiful young woman;¹ but I have no common friend to procure me that permission, without which I would not dare to spread the copy.

I am quite aware, madam, what task the world would assign me in this letter. The obscure bard, when any of the great condescend to take notice of him, should heap the altar with the incense of flattery. Their high ancestry, their own great and godlike qualities and actions, should be recounted with the most exaggerated description. This, madam, is a task for which I am altogether unfit. Besides a certain disqualifying pride of heart, I know nothing

¹ Miss Alexander.

of your connections in life, and have no access to where your real character is to be found—the company of your compeers; and more, I am afraid that even the most refined adulation is by no means the road to your good opinion.

One feature of your character I shall ever with grateful pleasure remember—the reception I got when I had the honour of waiting on you at Stair. I am little acquainted with politeness, but I know a good deal of benevolence of temper and goodness of heart. Surely did those in exalted stations know how happy they could make some classes of their inferiors by condescension and affability, they would never stand so high, measuring out with every look the height of their elevation, but condescend as sweetly as did Mrs Stewart of Stair.

R. B.

Another person of local eminence whose friendly regard Burns obtained through the merit of his poetical volume, was the Rev. Mr George Lawrie, minister of the parish of Loudon, a few miles from Mossiel. This appears to have been a remarkably fine specimen of the old moderate clergy of the Scottish establishment—sensible, upright, kind-hearted, and with no mean taste in literature. He was the friend of Blair, Robertson, Blacklock, and other distinguished men of the period, and it had been his fortune to serve as the medium by which Macpherson's Ossianic fragments were brought under the attention of the first mentioned of these literati, by whom they were submitted to the world. Lawrie had read the Poems with a high sense of their merit, but in a case so extraordinary, he was not inclined to trust entirely to his own judgment. He sent the book to his friend Blacklock in Edinburgh, asking his opinion of it, and hinting that it would be well to communicate it to Dr Blair, if that could be conveniently accomplished.

At Loudon manse, in a beautiful situation on Irvine Water, entitled St Margaret's Hill, the rustic bard paid the good minister a visit. He was received with the greatest cordiality, and immediately found himself in the midst of what was to him a scene equally novel and charming. Besides the mild matron, there were—a son rising into manhood, three beautiful and accomplished daughters, 'woman-grown,' and one of tenderer years. One of the young ladies played the spinnet to Burns—the first time he had ever heard such an instrument. He told her that she knew the magic way to a poet's heart. Among the liberalities of Mr Lawrie was a love of dancing, with a conviction that it was useful in promoting health and cheerfulness in his house. Scarcely a day passed in the manse when this exercise was not indulged. It was,

therefore, exactly what might have been expected, that after dinner, or in the course of the evening, there was a dance, led by the excellent pastor and his lady, and in which Burns and other guests joined. Burns, it may be observed, though somewhat heavy-limbed, was a good dancer. Miss Louisa afterwards stated the interesting observation she made on this occasion, that the bard 'kept time admirably.' He retired for the night, with feelings deeply touched by the simple refinement, good-nature, and mutual affection of this family, as well as by the unaffected kindness which had been shewn to himself. In the morning, finding him somewhat unprompt in coming down to breakfast, young Mr Archibald went up to inquire for him, and meeting him on the stair, asked how he had slept. 'Not well,' said the bard; 'the fact is, I have been praying half the night. If you go up to my room, you will find my prayers on the table.' It really was so. The young man found the well-known verses afterwards published by Burns with a descriptive title:—

LYING AT A FRIEND'S HOUSE ONE NIGHT, THE AUTHOR LEFT THE FOLLOWING

VERSES

IN THE ROOM WHERE HE SLEPT:—

Oh thou dread Power, who reign'st above,
I know thou wilt me hear,
When for this scene of peace and love
I make my prayer sincere!

The hoary sire—the mortal stroke,
Long, long be pleased to spare,
To bless his filial little flock,
And shew what good men are.

She, who her lovely offspring eyes
With tender hopes and fears,
Oh bless her with a mother's joys,
But spare a mother's tears!

Their hope, their stay, their darling youth,
In manhood's dawning blush—
Bless him, thou God of love and truth,
Up to a parent's wish!

The beauteous, seraph sister-band,
With earnest tears I pray,
Thou know'st the snares on every hand—
Guide thou their steps alway.

When soon or late they reach that coast,
 O'er life's rough ocean driven,
 May they rejoice, no wanderer lost—
 A family in heaven !

It may be imagined with what pleasure the family would receive this elegant tribute of regard from one whom they only knew in consequence of the admiration in which they held his talents. But it appears, that we are not to consider the Prayer as the only expression which the poet gave of the feeling inspired by the mirthful scene of the preceding evening. Miss Louisa Lawrie possessed a scrap of verse in the poet's handwriting—a mere trifle, but apparently intended as part of a lyric description of the manse festivities. 'The locality,' says a relative of the family, 'corresponds perfectly—the old castle of Newmills, visible from the manse windows in those days, before the trees were grown up—the hills opposite to the south—and the actual scene of enjoyment, standing on the very banks of the Irvine. Some little licence must be granted to the poet with respect to his lengthening the domestic dance so far into the night.'

The night was still, and o'er the hill
 The moon shone on the castle wa' ;
 The mavis sang, while dew-drops hang
 Around her, on the castle wa'.

Sae merrily they danced the ring,
 Frae eenin' till the cock did craw ;
 And aye the o'erword o' the spring,
 Was Irvine's bairns are bonny a'.

The time for parting came, and the benevolent host was left by Burns under feelings deeply affected by the consideration that so bright a genius should be contemplating a destiny so dismal as a clerkship in the West Indies. As yet, however, Mr Lawrie felt himself unable to suggest or promote any plan by which a better prospect might be opened to the young poet. A wide stretch of moor had to be passed by Burns on his way home.¹ 'His mind was strongly affected by parting for ever with a scene where he had tasted so much elegant and social pleasure, and depressed by the contrasted gloom of his prospects. The aspect of nature harmonised with his feelings. It was a lowering and heavy evening in the end [beginning?] of autumn. The wind was

¹ Professor Walker gives the ensuing narration from the conversation of Burns in Edinburgh.

up, and whistled through the rushes and long spear-grass which bent before it. The clouds were driving across the sky; and cold pelting showers at intervals added discomfort of body to cheerlessness of mind.' Under these circumstances, and in this frame, Burns composed what he considered as 'the last song he should ever measure in Caledonia':—

THE GLOOMY NIGHT IS GATHERING FAST.

TUNE—*Roslin Castle.*

The gloomy night is gathering fast,
Loud roars the wild inconstant blast;
Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,
I see it driving o'er the plain;
The hunter now has left the moor,
The scattered coveys meet secure;
While here I wander, pressed with care,
Along the lonely banks of Ayr.

The Autumn mourns her ripening corn,
By early Winter's ravage torn;
Across her placid, azure sky,
She sees the seowling tempest fly;
Chill runs my blood to hear it rave—
I think upon the stormy wave,
Where many a danger I must dare,
Far from the bonny banks of Ayr.

'Tis not the surging billow's roar,
'Tis not that fatal deadly shore;
Though death in every shape appear,
The wretched have no more to fear!
But round my heart the ties are bound,
That heart transpierced with many a wound;
These bleed afresh, those ties I tear,
To leave the bonny banks of Ayr.

Farewell old Coila's hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales;
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
Pursuing past, unhappy loves!
Farewell, my friends! farewell, my foes!
My peace with these, my love with those—
The bursting tears my heart declare;
Farewell the bonny banks of Ayr!

In a modest mansion in the outskirts of Edinburgh dwelt that remarkable man, Dr Thomas Blacklock—blind from early infancy,

yet a poet, a clergyman, and a man of comprehensive intelligence—possessed, moreover, of the kindest and most benevolent nature, and beloved, accordingly, by all who approached him. Thirteen years before, Samuel Johnson had visited this amiable person, and relenting in the contemplation of so much gentle goodness, joined to a patient resignation under one of the severest of natural deprivations, had said ‘with a humane complacency,’ as Boswell expresses it: ‘Dear Dr Blacklock, I am glad to see you.’ Cruelly disappointed of a clerical charge, in consequence of his blindness, Blacklock had settled into a humble but respectable mode of living, as the keeper of a boarding establishment for young men attending school and college. He was himself of course not richer than befitted a son of the Muses; but this neither chilled his benevolent heart nor dulled his poetical sensibilities. Dr Walker says: ‘If the young men were enumerated whom he drew from obscurity, and enabled, by education, to advance themselves in life, the catalogue would naturally excite surprise.’ On reading the volume of Poems sent to him by his friend Lawrie, he experienced sensations which he must be allowed to describe for himself. The following is the letter he addressed on the occasion to his correspondent at St Margaret’s Hill: ¹—

TO MR GEORGE LAWRIE, V.D.M.²

ST MARGARET'S HILL, KILMARNOCK.

EDIN. Sept. 4, 1786.

‘REV. AND DEAR SIR—I ought to have acknowledged your favour long ago, not only as a testimony of your kind remembrance, but as it gave me an opportunity of sharing one of the finest and perhaps one of the most genuine entertainments of which the human mind is susceptible. A number of avocations retarded my progress in reading the Poems; at last, however, I have finished that pleasing perusal. Many instances have I seen of nature’s force or beneficence exerted under numerous and formidable disadvantages; but none equal to that with which you have been kind enough to present me. There is a pathos and delicacy in his serious poems, a vein of wit and humour in those of a more festive turn, which cannot be too much admired, nor too warmly approved; and I think I shall never open the book without feeling my astonishment renewed and

¹ This letter, certainly one of the most interesting documents connected with Scottish literary history, is now in the possession of the Rev. Balfour Graham, minister of North Berwick, son-in-law of the late Rev. Archibald Lawrie, the son of Blacklock’s correspondent.

² V. D. M.—*i. e.* Verbi Dei Minister.

increased. It was my wish to have expressed my approbation in verse; but whether from declining life, or a temporary depression of spirits, it is at present out of my power to accomplish that intention.

'Mr Stewart, Professor of Morals in this University, had formerly read me three of the poems, and I had desired him to get my name inserted among the subscribers; but whether this was done or not I never could learn. I have little intercourse with Dr Blair, but will take care to have the Poems communicated to him by the intervention of some mutual friend. It has been told me by a gentleman, to whom I shewed the performances, and who sought a copy with diligence and ardour, that the whole impression is already exhausted. It were therefore much to be wished, for the sake of the young man, that a second edition, more numerous than the former, could immediately be printed; as it appears certain that its intrinsic merit, and the exertion of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been published in my memory. * * *

T. BLACKLOCK.'

Mr Lawrie—whose gratification in receiving such a confirmation of his own opinion, and one so calculated to inspire better hopes of the future fortunes of Burns, must have been extreme—lost no time in communicating the letter to Mr Gavin Hamilton, that it might be placed in the hands of the poet. The receipt of it at Mossiel was as a burst of sunshine on a wintry day. Burns says truly, 'The doctor belonged to a set of crities for whose applause I had not dared to hope.' New prospects were, as he says, opened to his poetic ambition. With persons of reflection, however, hopes that come after long experience of depression and suffering are usually succeeded by new fears. Burns says: 'His [Blacklock's] opinion that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance or a single letter of introduction.' In this there is only a general truth. Blacklock said nothing of Edinburgh, and Burns did not proceed to that city till upwards of two months after. No doubt the letter had acted as an invitation to try his fortune in the capital; but it had not the immediate effect of attracting him thither. For weeks after its receipt, we find him continuing to contemplate the West Indies as his most likely destiny, although disposed to stay at home if possible. Indeed it can scarcely be doubted that, but for the accidental delay of the vessel in which his passage was taken out, the Ayrshire poet would have been on his way

across the Atlantic long before any decided temptation arose to induce him to try his fortune in Edinburgh.¹

It was on the day before Blacklock wrote his letter that the birth of his twin children was announced to the poet; and this event was not without its influence in shaping his career. He felt the claim of these infants upon his care, and desired to remain at home for their protection. At the same time, he beheld in his cruel fortunes, and felt in his late mortifications, powerful reasons for holding by his original plan. In these circumstances, his generous friends Aiken and Hamilton took some trouble to ascertain if there was not a chance of securing an appointment in the Excise, as a means of providing for him at home. But even of this change of fortune, if realised, he feared that he might not be able to take advantage. While thus in suspense, he took his usual share in the labours of the harvest, occasionally visited his friends at Ayr and elsewhere, and did not allow the Muse to remain uncultivated. When not engaged in company or in composition, the wells of bitter recollection would flow out, and steep his soul in wretchedness.

It seems to have been at the close of autumn that he composed his amusing poem, *The Brigs of Ayr*, the model of which he found in Fergusson's *Dialogue between the Plainstanes and Causeway*, though, as usual, he made an immense advance upon his predecessor. A new bridge was now building across the river at Ayr, in order to supersede an ancient structure which had long been inconvenient, and was now infirm, and as this work was proceeding under the chief magistracy of his kind patron, Mr Ballantyne,

¹ What is here presented regarding the connection of Burns with the minister of London, is arranged, according to the best of the editor's judgment, from the statements of Professor Walker (*Life of Burns*), Gilbert Burns (*Currie*, vol. iii., Appendix), and manuscript notices supplied by Mr Lawrie's family, which have already been made use of in *The Land of Burns*. I must candidly apprise the reader that the materials are not self-consistent, and that I can only pretend, out of several difficulties, to have chosen what appeared to me the least. The date assigned by Walker for Burns's visit is the 'end of autumn'; but this neither comports with the date of Dr Blacklock's letter, afterwards received, nor with the accounts we have of Burns's intentions in other quarters. That degree of determination for the West Indies which alone could have prompted *The Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast*, had certainly ceased before September was far advanced, though the plan was not wholly abandoned till October had expired. The song itself describes autumn objects and circumstances, though under an intrusion of wintry weather. Severe cold blasts are certainly not uncommon at any period of a Scottish autumn, but it did happen that there was a violent storm, accompanied by rain and lightning, in the west of Scotland on the two last days of August and first of September this year, being the time which we have in view for the incident.

Burns seized the occasion to make a return of gratitude by inscribing the poem to him :—

THE BRIGS OF AYR.

INSCRIBED TO JOHN BALLANTYNE, ESQ., AYR.

The simple Bard, rough at the rustic plough,
Learning his tuneful trade from every bough ;
The chunting linnet, or the mellow thrush,
Hailing the setting sun, sweet, in the green thorn-bush ;
The soaring lark, the perching redbreast shrill,
Or deep-toned plovers, gray, wild-whistling o'er the hill ;
Shall he, nurst in the peasant's lowly shed,
To hardy independence bravely bred,
By early poverty to hardship steeled,
And trained to arms in stern misfortune's field—
Shall he be guilty of their hireling crimes,
The servile, mercenary Swiss of rhymes ?
Or labour hard the panegyric close,
With all the venal soul of dedicating prose ?
No ! though his artless strains he rudely sings,
And throws his hand uncouthly o'er the strings,
He glows with all the spirit of the Bard,
Fame, honest Fame, his great, his dear reward !
Still, if some patron's generous care he trace,
Skilled in the secret to bestow with grace ;
When Ballantyne befriends his humble name,
And hands the rustic stranger up to Fame,
With heartfelt throes his grateful bosom swells,
The godlike bliss, to give, alone excels.

Nae mair the flower in field or meadow springs ;
 Nae mair the grove with airy concert rings,
 Except, perhaps, the robin's whistling glee,
 Proud o' the height o' some bit half-lang tree :
 The hoary morns precede the sunny days,
 Mild, calm, serene, wide spreads the noontide blaze,
 While thick the gossamour waves wanton in the rays.

'Twas in that season, when a simple Bard,
 Unknown and poor, Simplicity's reward,
 Ae night, within the ancient brugh of Ayr,
 By whim inspired, or haply prest wi' care,
 He left his bed, and took his wayward route,
 And down by Simpson's¹ wheeled the left-about :
 (Whether impelled by all-directing Fate,
 To witness what I after shall narrate ;²
 Or whether, rapt in meditation high,
 He wandered out he knew not where or why)
 The drowsy Dungeon-clock³ had numbered two,
 And Wallace Tower⁴ had sworn the fact was true :
 The tide-swoln Firth, with sullen sounding roar,
 Through the still night dashed hoarse along the shorc.
 All else was hushed as Nature's closed e'e :
 The silent moon shone high o'er tower and tree :
 The chilly frost, beneath the silver beam,
 Crept, gently-crusting, o'er the glittering stream.
 When lo ! on either hand the listening Bard,
 The clang ing sugh of whistling wings is heard ; rustle
 Two dusky forms dart through the midnight air,
 Swift as the gos⁵ drives on the wheeling hare :

Ane on the Auld Brig his airy shape uprears,
 The ither flutters o'er the rising piers :
 Our warlock Rhymer instantly descried
 The Sprites that owre the Brigs of Ayr preside.
 (That Bards are second-sighted is nae joke,
 And ken the lingo of the sp'ritual folk ;

¹ A noted tavern at the Auld Brig end.—*B.*

² In a MS. copy, here occur two lines omitted in print :

‘Or penitential pangs for former sins
 Led him to rove by quondam Merran Din's.’

³ A clock in a steeple connected with the old jail of Ayr. This steeple and its clock were removed some years ago.

⁴ The clock in the Wallace Tower—an anomalous piece of antique masonry, surmounted by a spire, which stood in the High Street of Ayr. It was removed some years ago, and replaced by a more elegant tower, which bears its name.

⁵ The gos-hawk, or falcon.—*B.*

Fays, Spunkies, Kelpies, a', they can explain them,
 And even the very deils they bawly ken them.) well know
 Auld Brig appeared of ancient Pictish race,
 The very wrinkles Gothic in his face :
 He seemed as he wi' Time had warstl'd lang,
 Yet, teughly doure, he bade an unco bang. obdurate—stroke
 New Brig was buskit in a braw new coat,
 That he at Lon'on, frae ane Adams, got ;
 In's hand five taper staves as smooth's a bead,
 Wi' virls and whirlygigums at the head.
 The Goth was stalking round with anxious search,
 Spying the time-worn flaws in every arch ;
 It chaneed his new-come neebor took his c'c,
 And e'en a vexed and angry heart had he !
 Wi' thieveless sneer to see his modish mien, spited
 He, down the water, gies him this guid-e'en :—

AULD BRIG.

I doubt na, frien', ye 'll think ye 're nae sheepshank,¹
 Ance ye were streekit o'er frae bank to bank, stretched
 But gin ye be a brig as auld as me—
 Though, faith, that day I doubt ye 'll never see ;
 There 'll be, if that date come, I 'll wad a boddle, bet a doit
 Some fewer whigmaleeries in your noddle.

NEW BRIG.

Auld Vandal, ye but shew your little mense, civility
 Just much about it wi' your scanty sense ;
 Will your poor, narrow footpath of a street—
 Whare twa wheel-barrows tremble when they meet—
 Your ruined, formless bulk o' stane and lime,
 Compare wi' bonny Brigs o' modern time ?
 There 's men o' taste would tak the Ducat Stream,²
 Though they should cast the very sark and swim,
 Ere they would grate their feelings wi' the view
 Of sic an ugly Gothic hulk as you.

AULD BRIG.

Conceited gowk, puffed up wi' windy pride ! fool
 This monie a year I 've stood the flood and tide ;
 And though wi' crazy eild I 'm sair forfairn, age—enfeebled
 I 'll be a Brig when ye 're a shapeless cairn !
 As yet ye little ken about the matter,
 But twa-three winters will inform yc better.

¹ No contemptible or worthless thing.

² A noted ford just above the Auld Brig.—B.

When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains,
 Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains ;
 When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,
 Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil,
 Or where the Greenock winds his moorland course,
 Or haunted Garpal¹ draws his feeble source,
 Aroused by blustering winds and spotting thowes,
 In monie a torrent down his snaw-broo rowes ;
 While crashing ice, borne on the roaring speat, flood
 Sweeps dams, and mills, and brigs a' to the gate ; way
 And from Glenbuck² down to the Rattan-key³
 Auld Ayr is just one lengthened tumbling sea—
 Then down ye'll hurl, deil nor ye never rise !
 And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies. muddy waves
 A lesson sadly teaching, to your cost,
 That Architecture's noble art is lost !

NEW BRIG.

Fine Architecture, growth, I needs must say 't o't !
 The L— be thankit that we've tint the gate o't ! lost
 Gaunt, ghastly, ghaist-alluring edifices,
 Hanging with threatening jut, like precipices ;
 O'erarching, mouldy, gloom-inspiring coves,
 Supporting roofs fantastic, stony groves :
 Windows, and doors in nameless sculpture drest,
 With order, symmetry, or taste unblest ;
 Forms like some bedlam statuary's dream,
 The crazed creations of misguided whim ;
 Forms might be worshipped on the bended knee,
 And still the second dread command be free,
 Their likeness is not found on earth, in air, or sea.
 Mansions that would disgrace the building taste
 Of any mason reptile, bird or beast ;
 Fit only for a doited monkish race, doting
 Or frosty maids forsworn the dear embrace ;
 Or cuifs of latter times, wha held the notion fools
 That sullen gloom was sterling true devotion ;
 Fancies that our good Brugh denies protection !⁴
 And soon may they expire, unblest with resurrection !

AULD BRIG.

Oh ye, my dear remembered ancient yealings, coevals
 Were ye but here to share my wounded feelings !

¹ The banks of Garpal Water is one of the few places in the west of Scotland where those fancy-scaring beings, known by the name of ghaists, still continue pertinaciously to inhabit.—B.

² The source of the river Ayr.—B.

³ A small landing-place above the large key.—B.

⁴ An allusion to the moderatism of the Ayr clergy.

Ye worthy Proveses, and monic a Bailie,
 Wha in the paths o' righteousness did toil aye ;
 Ye dainty Deacons and ye douce Convecnrs,
 To whom our moderns are but causey-cleaners ;
 Ye godly Councils wha hae blest this town ;
 Ye godly brethren o' the sacred gown,
 Wha meekly ga'e your hurdies to the smiters ;
 And (what would now be strange)¹ ye godly writers ;
 A' ye douce folk I've borne aboon the broo, water
 Were ye but here, what would ye say or do !
 How would your spirits groan in deep vexation,
 To see each melancholy alteration ;
 And agonising, curse the time and place
 When ye begat the base degenerate race !
 Nae langer reverend men, their country's glory,
 In plain braid Scots hold forth a plain braid story !
 Nae langer thrifty citizens and douce,
 Meet owre a pint, or in the council-house ;
 But staunircl, corky-headed, graceless gentry, half-witted
 The herryment and ruin of the country ;
 Men three parts made by tailors and by barbers,
 Wha waste your weel-hained gear on d—— new Brigs and
 Harbours !

NEW BRIG.

Now hand you there, for faith you've said enough,
 And muckle mair than ye can mak to through ;² make good
 As for your Priesthood I shall say but little,
 Corbies and Clergy are a shot right kittle :
 But, under favour o' your langer beard,
 Abusc o' magistrates might weel be spared :
 To liken them to your auld-warld squad,
 I must needs say comparisons are odd.
 In Ayr, wag-wits nae mair can hae a handle
 To mouth 'a citizen,' a term o' scandal ;
 Nae mair the Council waddles down the street,
 In all the pomp of ignorant conceit ;³
 Men wha grew wise priggin' owre hops and raisins,
 Or gathered liberal views in bonds and seisins,

¹ A sly hint at the easy professions of the Ayr *writers* or lawyers now known to Burns.

² Inserted in MS. copy :

'That's aye a string auld doited Grayboards harp on,
 A topic for their peevishness to carp on.'

³ Variation in MS. :

'Nae mair down street the Council quorum waddles,
 With wigs like mainsails on their logger noddles ;
 No difference but bulkiest or tallest,
 With comfortable dulness in for ballast :
 Nor shoals nor currents need a pilot's caution,
 For regularly slow, they only witness motion.'

If haply Knowledge, on a random tramp,
 Had shored them with a glimmer of his lamp, offered
 And would to Common-sense for once betrayed them,
 Plain, dull Stupidity stept kindly in to aid them.

What further clish-ma-claver might been said, palaver
 What bloody wars, if Sprites had blood to shed,
 No man can tell ; but all before their sight,
 A fairy train appeared in order bright ;
 Adown the glittering stream they featly danced ;
 Bright to the moon their various dresses glanced :
 They footed o'er the watery glass so neat,
 The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet :
 While arts of minstrelsy among them rung,
 And soul-ennobling bards heroic ditties sung.
 Oh had M'Lachlan,¹ thairm-inspiring sage, eat-gut
 Been there to hear this heavenly band engage,
 When through his dear strathspeys they bore with Highland
 rage ;
 Or when they struck old Scotia's melting airs,
 The lover's raptured joys or bleeding cares ;
 How would his Highland lug been nobler fir'd, ear
 And even his matchless hand with finer touch inspired !
 No guess could tell what instrument appeared,
 But all the soul of Music's self was heard ;
 Harmonious concerte rung in every part,
 While simple melody pour'd moving on the heart.

The Genius of the stream in front appears,
 A venerable chief advanced in years ;
 His hoary head with water-lilies crowned,
 His manly leg with garter tangle bound.
 Next came the loveliest pair in all the ring,
 Sweet Female Beauty hand in hand with Spring ;
 Then, crowned with flowery hay, came Rural Joy,
 And Summer, with his fervid-beaming eye :
 All-cheering Plenty, with her flowing horn,
 Led yellow Autumn, wreathed with nodding corn ;

¹ A well-known performer of Scottish music on the violin.—*B.* James M'Lachlan, a Highlander, had been once footman to Lord John Campbell at Inverary. He came to Ayrshire in a fencible regiment, and was patronised by Hugh Montgomery of Coilsfield (afterwards Earl of Eglinton), who was himself both a player and a composer. Matthew Hall, who was lately living in extreme old age at Newton-npon-Ayr, used to accompany M'Lachlan over a wide extent of country, for the purpose of playing at gentlemen's houses, and even in Edinburgh and Glasgow on great occasions. In one week, to use Hall's words, they have passed twenty-six parish kirks, and returned to Ayr on Friday to a ball, never getting to bed till Saturday night.—*Ballads and Songs of Ayrshire.*

Then Winter's time-bleached locks did hoary shew,
By Hospitality with cloudless brow.
Next followed Courage, with his martial stride,
From where the Feal wild woody coverts hide;¹
Benevolence, with mild, benignant air,
A female form, came from the towers of Stair:²
Learning and Worth in equal measures trode
From simple Catrine, their long-loved abode:³
Last, white-robed Peace, crowned with a hazel wreath,
To rustic Agriculture did bequeath
The broken iron instruments of death;
At sight of whom our Sprites forgat their kindling wrath.

All through this summer, while he was in his local, social, and domestic character a wretched and unfortunate man, while yet that was preparing by which he was to be ultimately raised to the pinnacle of literary glory, the singular episode of Highland Mary remained unaccomplished. Yet, notwithstanding rucings of affection about Jean, and poetical gallantries towards the Bonnie Lass of Ballochmyle, and perhaps others, his mind must have been all the time charged in its deeper and more mystic recesses with the idea of the simple girl, who, after pledging her love to him in his hour of bitter humiliation, had gone to see her friends in the West Highlands, preparatory to their contemplated union. Burns makes no reference to this affair in his letters or poems; he observed entire silence about it in the Mossgiel household. There is therefore such a want of direct evidence on the subject, that we might almost justifiably set it out of sight, if there were not overpowering circumstantial proof that it was an affair actually going on at this time. The circumstances are here presented in the best arrangement which the case admits of.

Mary, we are to presume from the narration of the poet, had proceeded, immediately after their parting, to Campbelton, where her parents then resided. She had spent the summer there; but there is no evidence that she had taken any steps in arranging matters for a union with Burns, although it is believed that she received letters from him. After having spent the summer at home, she agreed, at the recommendation of her former patroness, Mrs Isabella Campbell, to accept a new situation for the term

¹ We have here a compliment to Montgomery of Coilsfield—Soger Hugh—alluded to in the preceding note. Coilsfield is situated on the Feal, or Faile, a tributary of the Ayr.

² A compliment to his early patroness, Mrs Stewart of Stair. See notes to *Epistle to Davie*.

³ A compliment to Professor Dugald Stewart.

beginning at Martinmas, in the family of a Colonel M'Ivor in Glasgow.

A cousin of Mary's mother was the wife of one Peter Macpherson, a ship-carpenter at Greenock. It being determined that her younger brother Robert should be entered with Macpherson as an apprentice, her father came to Greenock to make the proper arrangements, and Mary accompanied him, professedly on her way to Glasgow for the purpose of entering on her service with Colonel M'Ivor, but secretly perhaps with the further design of taking a final farewell of Burns when he should depart for the West Indies; for Burns has expressly said that she crossed the sea [the Firth of Clyde] to meet him. There was what is called a *brothering-feast* at Macpherson's, on Robert Campbell being admitted to the craft, and Mary gave her assistance in serving the company. Next morning, the boy Robert was so indisposed as to be unable to go to his work. When Macpherson came home to breakfast, he asked what had detained him from the yard, and was told that the young man was very poorly. Mary jocularly observed that he had probably taken a little too much after supper last night, and Macpherson, to keep up the badinage, said: 'Oh, then, it is as well, in case of the worst, that I have agreed to purchase that *lair* in the kirk-yard;' referring to a place of sepulture which he had just secured for his family—a very important matter in Greenock, as there was then no resting-place for the remains of those who did not possess such property, except the corner assigned to strangers and paupers, or a grave obtained by favour from a friend.

The young man's illness proved more serious than was at first supposed, and Mary attended him with great tenderness and assiduity. In a few days Robert began to recover, but at the same time Mary drooped, and became seriously unwell. Her friends believed that she suffered from the cast of an evil eye, and recommended her father to go to a cross burn—that is, a place where two burns meet—and select seven smooth stones from the channel, boil them with new milk for a certain time, and then give her the milk to drink. It must be remembered that these were Highland people, and that the Highlanders are to this day full of superstitious notions. The drink was duly prepared, as had been recommended, and given to Mary; but her illness was soon declared to be fever, of a malignant species, then prevalent in the town, and in a few days the poor girl died. She was buried in the *lair* which her relative had so recently bought, being the first of the family who was placed in it.

Such are the particulars derived from Macpherson's daughter, and from a male relative of the family¹ who has often conversed on the subject with Mary's mother. There seems to be no good reason for doubting them, or any of them. The only point in which the story is defective is the date, a matter regarding which the memory is apt to be less faithful than with respect to events. There is, unluckily, no register of deaths or funerals for this period in Greenock. On a visit to the town for the purpose of making investigations, the first attention of the editor was given to Mary's grave. It is in the burial-ground of the West Church, the original and principal parish of Greenock—a melancholy and half-deserted precinct, so close to the Firth of Clyde, that a stone could be thrown into it from the passing steamers. In a central situation are two flat stones, recording the ancestors of the illustrious James Watt. Near the west end is the little plot which had belonged to Peter Macpherson, the ship-carpenter. Shading it from the setting sun is a tall elegant structure, which a few admirers of Burns have erected for the commemoration of her whom the poet loved. It contains a sculpture representing the parting of the lovers, surmounted by a figure weeping over an urn, on which is inscribed the name Mary. At the foot of this lofty structure nestles the original little *head-stone* of Macpherson. In its semi-lunar upper compartment are carved the tools of a carpenter, with the date 1760. Underneath, on the square body of the stone, is the legend: 'This Burying-place belongs to Peter Macpherson, ship-carpenter in Greenock, and Mary Campbell his spouse, and their children, 1787.' There was an uncertainty here. The stone might have been erected in 1760 by some member of Macpherson's family, from whom he had inherited it; and notwithstanding the legend and second date, Mary might have been buried there at any time from 1760 downward. It is, however, observable that the legend and second date are inscribed upon a surface half an inch or so *inward* from that on which the tools are carved, as if an earlier inscription had been obliterated—implying that the stone had undergone a renovation in 1787. If that was to be regarded as a doing of Macpherson when he became possessed of the *lair*, the tendency of the evidence might be said to be in favour of a late, rather than an early date for the death of Mary. Still, the matter was left at an unsatisfactory point.

At this stage of the inquiry it was brought to mind that there

¹ Mr J. C. Douglas, clothier, Greenock.

was a Register of Lairs, in which it might be hoped that the date of Macpherson's purchase was entered. A wretched tattered old volume was found buried in a mass of similar rubbish in the possession of Mr Teulon, superintendent of the burying-grounds of Greenock, by whose obliging assistance, with no small difficulty, an entry was at length found, to the following effect:—

' 1760.			feet
' Jan'y 14.	Duncan Robertson, carpenter,	6	£0 9 0
' 1786.			
' Oct. 12.	This lair is this day transferred to Peter Macpherson, ship-carpenter in Greenock.'		

There could not of course remain the slightest doubt that the ground which contains the ashes of Highland Mary was bought by her relative at the very time when Robert Burns designed to sail from Greenock for the West Indies. Macpherson had, as conjectured, succeeded to a stone, which he had renovated, preserving only the sculpture of his predecessor's emblems of trade, because these were equally suitable for himself. Unless, then, we are to reject the family story entirely, and suppose it possible that Mary was buried here while Duncan Robertson possessed the ground, which the customs of sepulture in Greenock render to the last degree improbable, we must admit that her death took place in the latter part of 1786—consequently after her poet-lover had broken off his match with Jean Armour—in short, the piteous tale of the Highland Lassie comes in as one of several episodes that checkered the main attachment of Burns's life, that which terminated in making him at length a husband.

Mary's parents and other near relations, who afterwards settled in Greenock, were of such a grade of mind and strain of sentiment as to shrink for many years from all acknowledgment of Burns as her lover. It cannot be surprising that a man who could think of administering a decoction of pebbles as a cure for his daughter's illness, was narrow-spirited enough to burn the letters of a great poet, and forbid his name to be mentioned in the family. The mother, who was a good, kind-hearted creature, was more relenting. She learned to sing the song of the Highland Lassie to her grandchildren. On being asked by her grand-nephew, Mr J. C. Douglas, if she thought that Mary would have married Burns, she said that she could not tell what might have happened if Mary had survived, but she did not think her sweet lassie could have ever been happy with so wild and profane a genius as Burns—yet she would immediately add, that he was 'a real warm-hearted chield,' for

such was the impression he had made upon her when he had subsequently paid her a visit. The old woman always spoke of Mary, who was the eldest of her eight children, as a paragon of gentleness and amiability. Her sincerity was a quality which, above all others, the mother fondly dwelt on. There is, indeed, all desirable reason to believe that Mary was of a character to have graced, if not even rectified, a companion-spirit such as Burns—who, in subsequent years, might well have imagined that with her he could have been something different from what he was.

'What conquest o'er each erring thought
Of that fierce realm had Agnes wrought !
I had not wandered wild and wide,
With such an angel for my guide ;
Nor heaven nor earth could then reprove me
If she had lived, and lived to love me.'

We must now revert to Mossiel, where the poet was living in an unsettled state, looking forward to the Jamaica voyage, but still hopeful that a ram would be caught in the thicket—that is, an Excise situation prove attainable—so as to save him from exile. Mrs Begg remembers, that after the work of the season was over, and she had, as usual, taken to the *big wheel*, in which either her mother or one of her sisters was assisting her—Robert and Gilbert being also present—a letter for the former was handed in. He went to the window to open and read it, and she was struck by the look of agony which was the consequence. He went out without uttering a syllable. The family learned nothing of the facts of the case till after the publication of some of the songs written upon Mary; and even then they became aware of this strange passage in their brother's history only as something too sacred for discussion or remark.

Burns's reasons for maintaining a mystery on the subject can only be matter of conjecture. He might have some sense of remorse about this simple girl—he might feel some little shame on account of her humble position in life—he might dread the world's knowing that, after the affair of Jean Armour, in the midst of such calamitous circumstances, and facing a long exile in the West Indies, he had been so madly imprudent as to engage a poor girl to join him in wedlock, whether to go with him, or to wait for his return. Some remarks of Dr Currie, in which this affair is touched upon, and which significantly occur immediately after the recital of the rencontre with the Bonnie Lass of Ballochmyle, are here worthy of attention, as helping to verify a

narration otherwise apt to appear a modern myth:—‘The sensibility,’ says he, ‘of our bard’s temper, and the force of his imagination, exposed him in a particular manner to the impressions of beauty; and these qualities, united to his impassioned eloquence, gave him in turn a powerful influence over the female heart. The banks of the Ayr formed the scene of youthful passions of a still tenderer nature, *the history of which it would be improper to reveal, were it even in our power; and the traces of which will soon be discoverable only in those strains of nature and sensibility to which they gave birth.* The song entitled *Highland Mary* is known to relate to one of these attachments. “It was written,” says our bard, “on one of the most interesting passages of my youthful days.”’ The object of this passion died early in life, and the impression left on the mind of Burns seems to have been deep and lasting.¹ It seems not unlikely that Currie had got a hint of the affair from Gilbert Burns, but with injunctions to touch on it lightly.¹

The letter which follows, though undated, is evidently of this period. It throws a valuable light on the inner feelings of Burns at a time when he appeared to the common minds around him as only a reckless son of song. May we not reasonably suspect that some of the ‘wandering stabs of remorse’ to which he alludes bore reference to Highland Mary?—

TO MR ROBERT AIKEN.

[A little after Oct. 6?]

SIR—I was with Wilson my printer t’other day, and settled all our bygone matters between us. After I had paid all demands, I made him the offer of the second edition, on the hazard of being paid out of the first and readiest, which he declines. By his account, the paper of 1000 copies would cost about twenty-seven pounds, and

¹ Mr John Kerr of Glasgow, in a communication to the *Scots Times* in 1827, expresses his regret that none of the letters of Burns to Highland Mary are now in existence. ‘After Mary’s death,’ he says, ‘her father disliked all allusions to her or to her lover; and when Burns wrote a moving letter, requesting some memorial of her he loved so dearly, the stern old man neither answered it, nor allowed any one to speak about it in his presence.’ The Bible in two volumes, presented by Burns to Mary, remained in possession of the mother for many years, and was given by her to her only surviving daughter, Mrs Anderson. From Mrs Anderson it came to her son, William Anderson, mason in Renton, Dumbartonshire. He emigrated to Canada, carried the Bible with him, and it was there purchased by a party of gentlemen for £25, and forwarded to the provost of Ayr, to be presented in their name to the trustees of Burns’s monument. This was accordingly done on the 25th of January 1841, being the poet’s birthday. On the next anniversary of the poet’s birth, January 25, 1842, a handsome monument, which had cost about £100, raised by subscription, was consecrated to the memory of Highland Mary, on the spot of her sepulture in the West Kirk-yard of Greenock.

the printing about fifteen or sixteen : he offers to agree to this for the printing if I will advance for the paper, but this, you know, is out of my power ; so farewell hopes of a second edition till I grow richer ! an epocha which I think will arrive at the payment of the British national debt.

There is scarcely anything hurts me so much in being disappointed of my second edition, as not having it in my power to shew my gratitude to Mr Ballantyne, by publishing my poem of *The Brigs of Ayr*. I would detest myself as a wretch if I thought I were capable in a very long life of forgetting the honest, warm, and tender delicacy with which he enters into my interests. I am sometimes pleased with myself in my grateful sensations ; but I believe, on the whole, I have very little merit in it, as my gratitude is not a virtue, the consequence of reflection, but sheerly the instinctive emotion of my heart, too inattentive to allow worldly maxims and views to settle into selfish habits.

I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within respecting the Excise. There are many things plead strongly against it : the uncertainty of getting soon into business ; the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home ; and, besides, I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of the Muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad, and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances everything that can be laid in the scale against it.

You may perhaps think it an extravagant fancy, but it is a sentiment which strikes home to my very soul ; though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet I think I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stinted bourne of our present existence ; if so, then how should I, in the presence of that tremendous Being, the Author of existence, how should I meet the reproaches of those who stand to me in the dear relation of children, whom I deserted in the smiling innocence of helpless infancy ? Oh thou great unknown Power !—thou Almighty God ! who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality !—I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left me nor forsaken me !

Since I wrote the foregoing sheet, I have seen something of the storm of mischief thickening over my folly-devoted head. Should you, my friends, my benefactors, be successful in your applications for me, perhaps it may not be in my power in that way to reap the

fruit of your friendly efforts. What I have written in the preceding pages, is the settled tenor of my present resolution; but should inimical circumstances forbid me closing with your kind offer, or enjoying it only threaten to entail further misery——

To tell the truth, I have little reason for complaint, as the world, in general, has been kind to me fully up to my deserts. I was, for some time past, fast getting into the pining, distrustful snarl of the misanthrope. I saw myself alone, unfit for the struggle of life, shrinking at every rising cloud in the chance-directed atmosphere of fortune, while, all defenceless, I looked about in vain for a cover. It never occurred to me, at least never with the force it deserved, that this world is a busy scene, and man a creature destined for a progressive struggle; and that, however I might possess a warm heart and inoffensive manners (which last, by the by, was rather more than I could well boast), still, more than these passive qualities, there was something to be done. When all my school-fellows and youthful compeers (those misguided few excepted, who joined, to use a Gentoo phrase, the ‘hallachores’ of the human race) were striking off with eager hope and earnest intent in some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I ‘was standing idle in the market-place,’ or only left the chase of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt fancy from whim to whim.

You see, sir, that if to know one’s errors were a probability of mending them, I stand a fair chance; but, according to the reverend Westminster divines, though conviction must precede conversion, it is very far from always implying it.

R. B.

It thus appears that, while the country was ringing with his applause, the Ayrshire Ploughman, by which name he had already become distinguished, pined in secret wretchedness, to which there was no relief but in gay society, and in the excitement which he always felt while composing poetry. He was not yet relieved from the doom of banishment; the recollection of the late humiliating circumstances connected with his Jean pressed sore upon him: he saw himself in his place and circle fully as much a subject of vulgar obloquy as of admiration or affection. Under the immediate influence of circumstances so calculated to harass and depress the spirit, even those surgings of an ultra-provincial acclaim which were beginning to reach him, dear as they must have been to a poet’s bosom, could have little more effect than ‘the bare imagination of the summer’s heat’ is fitted to have on him who ‘thrills in regions of thick-ribbed ice.’ Little could the refined people who were with wonder and delight perusing the Kilmarnock volume, imagine what a complication of tragic fact and emotion its obscure author had contrived to wind around him.

But who is there that has not looked inward with surprise on

the variety of feelings which will pass through his bosom even at the most painful crises of existence? It certainly is not in human nature to concentrate the whole power of feeling for any length of time on one subject; while it is equally true that a great grief can be postponed—can be taken out, like a miniature from a cabinet, and gloated over at convenient times, and thus receive that full measure of entertainment which contents the conscience; although in the intervals the demands of business, the duties of society, and the homely needs of nature, be duly and even cheerfully attended to. It will be found hereafter that there is great reason for believing that the 20th of October was the date of the death of Highland Mary. We do not absolutely know that Burns was immediately apprised of the event; but whether he knew of it before the end of the month or not, it ought not perhaps to excite much surprise that, within that space, he was capable of writing in mirthful terms to those who had no occasion to know of there being any such subject of sad reflection in his mind.

Professor Dugald Stewart, the elegant expositor of the Scottish system of metaphysics, resided at this time in a villa at Catrine, on the Ayr, a few miles from the bard's farm. He had been made acquainted with the extraordinary productions of Burns by Mr Mackenzie, the clever, liberal-minded surgeon of Mauchline. At the request of the professor, Mackenzie came to dinner at Catrine, accompanied by the poet. We learn from infallible testimony that this was on the 23d of October, only three days after that assumed as the probable date of the death of Mary Campbell. Burns was sufficiently embarrassed at the idea of meeting in the flesh a distinguished member of the literary circle of Edinburgh; but, to increase the feeling, there chanced also to be present a young scion of nobility—Lord Daer, son of the Earl of Selkirk—a positively alarming idea to the rustic bard, who had as yet seen nobility no nearer than on the Ayr race-course, or whirling along the road in carriages. Lord Daer, who had been a pupil of Professor Stewart, had called, it appears, by chance. Of the meeting, Burns and Stewart have left their respective records:—

LINES ON MEETING WITH BASIL, LORD DAER.

This wot ye all whom it concerns,
I, Rhyming Robin, alias Burns,
October twenty-third,
A ne'er-to-be-forgotten day,
Sae far I sprachled up the brae,
I dinner'd wi' a Lord.

clambered

I've been at drucken writers' feasts,
 Nay, been bitch-fou 'mang godly priests,
 Wi' reverence be it spoken ;
 I've even joined the honoured jorum,
 When mighty squireships of the quorum
 Their hydra drouth did sloken.

But wi' a Lord !—stand out my shin,
 A Lord—a Peer—an Earl's son !

Up higher yet my bonnet !
 And sic a Lord !—lang Scotch ells twa,
 Our Peerage he o'erlooks them a',
 As I look o'er my sonnet.

But oh for Hogarth's magic power !
 To shew Sir Bardie's willyart glower, bewildered
 And how he stared and stammer'd,
 When goavan, as if led wi' branks, moving stupidly
 And stumpin' on his ploughman shanks,
 He in the parlour hammer'd.

I sidling sheltered in a nook,
 And at his Lordship steal't a look,
 Like some portentous omen ;
 Except good sense and social glee,
 And (what surprised me) modesty,
 I markèd nought uncommon.

I watched the symptoms o' the great,
 The gentle pride, the lordly state,
 The arrogant assuming ;
 The fient a pride, nae pride had he,
 Nor sauce, nor state, that I could see,
 Mair than an honest ploughman.

Then from his lordship I shall learn
 Henceforth to meet with unconcern
 One rank as weel 's another ;
 Nae honest worthy man need care
 To meet with noble youthful Daer,
 For he but meets a brother.¹

The professor, after some details about the visit, says: ‘ His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple,

¹ Lord Daer was a young nobleman of the greatest promise. He had just returned from France, where he cultivated the society of some of those men who afterwards figured in the Revolution (particularly Condorcet), and had contracted their sentiments. He was cut off in November 1794, leaving the succession open to his younger brother, the late Thomas, Earl of Selkirk, distinguished by his exertions in the cause of emigration.

manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth, but without anything that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened with apparent attention and deference on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness and accommodation in his temper, he would, I think, have been still more interesting; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of his ordinary acquaintance, and his dread of anything approaching to meanness or servility rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard. Nothing perhaps was more remarkable among his various attainments than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language, when he spoke in company; more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of expression, and avoided, more successfully than most Scotclimen, the peculiarities of Scottish phraseology.'

TO DR MACKENZIE, MAUCHLINE.

ENCLOSING HIM VERSES ON DINING WITH LORD DAER.

Wednesday Morning [October 25?]

DEAR SIR—I never spent an afternoon among great folks with half that pleasure as when, in company with you, I had the honour of paying my devoirs to that plain, honest, worthy man the professor [Dugald Stewart]. I would be delighted to see him perform acts of kindness and friendship, though I were not the object; he does it with such a grace. I think his character, divided into ten parts, stands thus—four parts Socrates, four parts Nathaniel, and two parts Shakspere's Brutus.

The foregoing verscs were really extempore, but a little corrected since. They may entertain you a little, with the help of that partiality with which you are so good as to favour the performances of, dear sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

In the course of his visits to Ayr, Burns had formed an acquaintance with Major William Logan, a retired military officer, noted for his wit, his violin-playing, and his convivial habits, who lived a cheerful bachelor-life with his mother and an unmarried sister. Burns had visited Logan at his villa of Park, near Ayr, had enjoyed his fiddle and his waggery, and run over—so to speak—the whole gamut of his congenial heart.¹ He had also been much

¹ The major was rather too convivial, and many were the jokes he made about his own habits. Asked one day by an Ayr hostess if he would have water to the glass of spirits she

pleased with the manners of the old lady and her daughter. On the 30th of October, he is found addressing the major in an epistle expressed in merry but careless verse :—

EPISTLE TO MAJOR LOGAN.

Hail, thairm-inspirin', rattlin' Willie ! fiddle-string
 Though Fortune's road be rough and hilly
 To every fiddling, rhyming billie,
 We never heed,
 But take it like the unbacked filly,
 Proud o' her speed.

When idly goavan whyles we saunter, moving stupidly
 Yirr, fancy barks, awa' we canter
 Uphill, down brae, till some mischanter, accident
 Some black bog-hole,
 Arrests us, then the scaith and banter
 We're forced to thole. bear

Hale be your heart!—hale be your fiddle!
 Lang may your elbock jink and diddle,
 To cheer you through the weary widdle
 O' this wild warl',
 Until you on a crummock driddle staff
 A gray-haired carle.

Come wealth, come poortith, late or soon,
 Heaven send your heart-strings aye in tune,
 And screw your temper-pins aboon
 A fifth or mair,
 The melancholious, lazy croon,
 O' cankrie care.

brought to him, he said, with a knowing grin: ‘No; I would rather ye took the water out o’t.’ One of his remarks was: ‘It is said that persons who eat much die of apoplexy; it is also said that persons who drink much die of apoplexy. My case is different, for I both eat much and drink much: therefore, I shall not die of apoplexy.’ He used to talk with high relish of the days when he was a prisoner in America: ‘Plenty to eat and drink, and no parades.’ One of his puns was so felicitous, that Thomas Hood himself might have envied it. A young officer was talking freely on religious subjects in the company of the major. He wound up with: ‘In fact, I look upon the Deity merely as my superior, and myself as his vassal.’ ‘Yes,’ quoth Logan, ‘ye may well say that, for I have no doubt you pay him *feu-duties*’—*quasi dicitur*, few duties.* The poor wit, overgrown with the effects of over-indulgencie, was at length the victim of painful ailments. The Rev. Mr Cuthill, one of the Ayr ministers, called to see him, and remarked that it would require fortitude to bear up under such sufferings. ‘Ay,’ said the dying major, ‘it would take *fjilitude*.’

* *Feu-duties* are in Scotland equivalent to ground-rent in England.

May still your life from day to day
 Nae 'lente largo' in the play,
 But 'allegretto forte' gay
 Harmonious flow
 A sweeping, kindling, bauld Strathspey—
 Encore ! Bravo !

A blessing on the cheery gang
 Wha dearly like a jig or sang,
 And never think o' right and wrang
 By square and rule,
 But as the clegs o' feeling stang, gadflies
 Are wise or fool.

My hand-waled curse keep hard in chase
 The harpy, hoodock, purse-proud race,
 Wha count on poortith as disgrace—
 Their tuneless hearts !
 May fireside discords jar a base
 To a' their parts !

But come, your hand, my careless brither,
 I' th' ither warl', if there's anither—
 And that there is I've little swither
 About the matter—
 We cheek for chow shall jog thegither ;
 I 'se ne'er bid better.

We 've faults and failings—granted clearly,
 We 're frail backsliding mortals merely,
 Eve's bonny squad priests wyte them shcerly
 For our grand fa' ;
 But still, but still—I like them dearly—
 God bless them a' !

Ochon for poor Castalian drinkers,
 When they fa' foul o' earthly jinkers,
 The witching cursed delicious blinkers
 Hae put me hyte,
 And gart me weet my waukrife winkers
 Wi' girnin' spite.

But by yon moon !—and that 's high swearin'—
 And every star within my hearin' !
 And by her een wha was a dear anc !
 I 'll ne'er forget ;
 I hope to gie the jads a clearin'
 In fair-play yet.

chosen
miserlydoubt
jole
expect

blame

mad
made—sleepless

My loss I mourn, but not repent it,
 I'll seek my pursie whare I tint it,
 Ance to the Indies I were wonted,
 Some cantrip hour,
 By some sweet elf I'll yet be dinted,
 Then, *vive l'amour!*

witching

Faites mes baise-mains respectueuses,
 To sentimental sister Susie,
 And honest Lucky; no to roose you,
 Ye may be proud,
 That sie a couple Fate allows ye
 To grace your blood.

Nae mair at present can I measure,
 And trowth, my rhymin' ware's nae treasure;
 But when in Ayr, some half-hour's leisure,
 Be't light, be't dark,
 Sir Bard will do himself the pleasure
 To call at Park.

R. B.

MOSSGIEL, 30th October 1786.

'But of all the friendships,' says Gilbert, 'which Robert acquired in Ayrshire and elsewhere, none seemed more agreeable to him than that of Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, nor any which has been more uniformly and constantly exerted in behalf of him and his family, of which, were it proper, I could give many instances. Robert was on the point of setting out for Edinburgh before Mrs Dunlop had heard of him. About the time of my brother's publishing in Kilmarnock, she had been afflicted with a long and severe illness, which had reduced her mind to the most distressing state of depression. In this situation, a copy of the printed Poems was laid on her table by a friend; and happening to open on *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, she read it over with the greatest pleasure and surprise; the poet's description of the simple cottagers operating on her mind like the charm of a powerful exorcist, expelling the demon *ennui*, and restoring her to her wonted inward harmony and satisfaction. Mrs Dunlop sent off a person express to Mossiel, distant fifteen or sixteen miles, with a very obliging letter to my brother, desiring him to send her half-a-dozen copies of his Poems, if he had them to spare, and begging he would do her the pleasure of calling at Dunlop House as soon as convenient. This was the beginning of a correspondence which ended only with the poet's

life. [Nearly] the last use he made of his pen was writing a short letter to this lady a few days before his death.' It may be added, by way of explanation, that Mrs Dunlop, as daughter of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, was regarded as a descendant of the celebrated Scottish patriot, though, in reality, her ancestor was only his brother.

TO MRS DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MADAM—I am truly sorry I was not at home yesterday, when I was so much honoured with your order for my copies, and incomparably more by the handsome compliments you are pleased to pay my poetic abilities. I am fully persuaded there is not any class of mankind so feelingly alive to the titillations of applause as the sons of Parnassus: nor is it easy to conceive how the heart of the poor bard dances with rapture, when those whose character in life gives them a right to be polite judges honour him with their approbation. Had you been thoroughly acquainted with me, madam, you could not have touched my darling heart-chord more sweetly than by noticing my attempts to celebrate your illustrious ancestor, the saviour of his country.

'Great patriot hero! ill-requited chief!'

The first book I met with in my early years which I perused with pleasure was *The Life of Hannibal*; the next was, *The History of Sir William Wallace*; for several of my earlier years I had few other authors, and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious but unfortunate stories. In those boyish days I remember in particular being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur:—

‘Syne to the Leglen Wood, when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat.’

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half-a-dozen of miles to pay my respects to the Leglen Wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged, I recollect (for even then I was a rhymer) that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits.

R. B.

There is reason to believe, that early in November Burns paid a second visit to St Margaret's Hill, probably with the design of

consulting Mr Lawrie about his future movements. In the course of conversation, allusion was made to the story of Miss Peggy K——, which was then beginning to make a noise in Ayrshire. It will be remembered that Burns had some time before formed the acquaintance of this hapless daughter of beauty, and written a song in her praise. It was now feared by many that she had qualified herself for a worse than doubtful position in society. Contrary to what might have been expected of Burns, he took the least favourable view of the case of Young Peggy. Mrs Lawrie, who had a great horror for talk of this kind, said something sharp to Burns with reference to his remarks, and this sank into his sensitive mind. Before taking his leave, he had promised to send Ossian, and a collection of songs, for the perusal of the young people. He did so, accompanying the parcel with the following letter :—

TO MR ARCHIBALD LAWRIE.

MOSSGIEL, November 13, 1786.

DEAR SIR—I have along with this sent two volumes of Ossian, with the remaining volume of the songs. Ossian I am not in such a hurry about; but I wish the songs, with the volume of the Scotch poets, as soon as they can conveniently be despatched. If they are left at Mr Wilson the bookseller's shop in Kilmarnock, they will easily reach me.

My most respectful compliments to Mr and Mrs Lawrie; and a poet's warmest wishes for their happiness to the young ladies, particularly the fair musician, whom I think much better qualified than ever David was, or could be, to charm an evil spirit out of Saul.

Indeed it needs not the feelings of a poet to be interested in the welfare of one of the sweetest scenes of domestic peace and kindred love that ever I saw; as I think the peaceful unity of St Margaret's Hill can only be excelled by the harmonious concord of the Apocalyptic Zion.

R. B.

When the books were opened, a slip of paper dropped out from between the leaves of one of the volumes, containing the following modest expostulation on the rebuke which had been administered by Mrs Lawrie :—

Rusticity's ungainly form
May cloud the highest mind;
But when the heart is nobly warm,
The good excuse will find.

Propriety's cold cautious rules
 Warm Fervour may o'erlook ;
 But spare poor Sensibility
 The ungentle, harsh rebuke.¹

It would appear that the bard had lent the songs without duly considering his own pressing need for them, as, two days later, he desired Connel the carrier to call at St Margaret's Hill with the following characteristic note :—

MONSR. MONSR. ARCHIBALD LAWRIE.

COLLINE DE ST MARGARETE.

MAUCHLINE, 15th November 1786.

DEAR SIR—If convenient, please return me by Connel, the bearer, the two volumes of songs I left last time I was at St Margaret's Hill.

My best compliments to all the good family.

A Dieu je vous commande.

ROBT. BURNS.

By this time Burns must have been aware of a circumstance most remarkable in such a career as his—the first mention of his name in a respectable organ of criticism. At that time the venerable *Scots Magazine* had a youthful rival in the *Edinburgh Magazine* of James Sibbald, a bookseller of literary taste, who seems to have been supported by many of the wits most interested in national antiquities and national poetry. The number of this work for October, published, as was then the custom, at the beginning of the month following that for which it was designated, contains a critique on *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, by Robert Burns, Kilmarnock.*² The article is not ill written, nor does it plead for approbation to the poet on low grounds. It speaks of him as ‘a striking example of native genius bursting through the obscurity of poverty and the obstructions of a laborious life.’ ‘To those,’ the critic goes on to say, ‘who admire the creations of untutored fancy, and are blind to many faults for the sake of numberless beauties, his poems will yield singular gratification. His observations on human character are acute and sagacious,

¹ The letter to Mr A. Lawrie and this, as well as a former scrap of verse respecting St Margaret's Hill, were first published in the *Land of Burns*, where a portrait of the Rev. George Lawrie is presented.

² In the *Edinburgh Advertiser* of November 3, the *Edinburgh Magazine for October* is advertised as ‘published this day,’ with the following addition to the usual description of the contents: ‘In this number are given ample extracts from the Poems of R. BURNS, a ploughman in Ayrshire.’

and his descriptions are lively and just. Of rustic pleasantry he has a rich fund, and some of his softer scenes are touched with inimitable delicacy. . . . The character Horace gives to Osellus is particularly applicable to him—

“Rusticus abnormis sapiens, crassaque Minerva.”

Copious extracts are added in justification of the critic's opinion. A copy of this panegyric from what Burns would deem a ‘high quarter,’ could scarcely fail to reach him ere November was far elapsed.

The precise time of his abandoning the resolution to go to the West Indies, and determining to remain to try his fortune in Edinburgh, cannot be ascertained. It does not appear to have been before the date of his *Epistle to Major Logan*—30th October. It was, however, before the 18th of November, when he told Mr Robert Muir of Kilmarnock, in a brief note, that he had now resolved to proceed to Edinburgh on Monday or Tuesday seven-night (the 27th or 28th). Mr Ballantyne of Ayr appears to have been concerned in the forming of this resolution. According to the report of Gilbert Burns, when it came to Mr Ballantyne's knowledge that the poet was prevented from printing a second edition by want of money to pay for the paper, he ‘generously offered to accommodate Robert with what money he might need for that purpose [£27], but advised him to go to Edinburgh, as the fittest place for publishing.’ It was very natural for the poet, in a brief account of his early career, to huddle up all the considerations and debatings on this subject, extending over a couple of months, in the abrupt reference to the effect of Dr Blacklock's letter; but it is the duty of the biographer to do his best to develop the matter at proper length, and with a just regard, in particular, to the kindness shewn to Burns by the gentlemen of his own district, before the capital had put any stamp upon him. The true extent of that kindness has, perhaps, never yet been fully appreciated.

It was at this crisis, and with a view to the proposed second edition, that Burns addressed a respectful letter to Miss Alexander of Ballochmyle, enclosing his song in her honour, and asking her permission to print it:—

TO MISS ALEXANDER.

MOSSGIEL, 18th Nov. 1786.

MADAM—Poets are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious whim, that I believe the world
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generally allows them a larger latitude in the laws of propriety than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present you with. Whether it has poetical merit anyway worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge: but it is the best my abilities can produce; and what to a good heart will perhaps be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.

The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I daresay, madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *rêveur* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my Muse, on the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you—your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn-twigs that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene, and such the hour, when, in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the fairest pieces of nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape or met a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce with aërial beings! Had Calumny and Villainy taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain dull historic prose into metaphor and measure!

The enclosed song was the work of my return home; and perhaps it but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene. * * * I have the honour to be, madam, your most obedient and very humble servant,

R. B.

Two days afterwards, having occasion to transmit a copy of a ballad fit for private perusal only to two friends in Ayr, he enclosed it in a sheet penned in the style of a public writ, commencing: 'In the name of the Nine, Amen! We, Robert Burns, by virtue of a warrant from Nature, bearing date the twenty-fifth day of January, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and fifty-nine, Poet-Laureate and Bard-in-Chief in and

over the districts and countries of Kyle, Cunningham, and Carrick, of old extent, to our trusty and well-beloved William Chalmers and John M'Adam, students and practitioners in the ancient and mysterious science of confounding right and wrong; commanding them to select ‘the most execrable individual of that execrable species, the Deil’s Yell Nowte [sheriff’s officers],’ and kindling a fire at the cross of Ayr, there at noon, to cause the said individual to burn the said ballad, ‘in abhorrence of, and terrorem to, all such compositions and composers:’ ‘this in no wise leave ye undone, but have it executed in every point, as our mandate bears, before the twenty-fourth current, when in person we hope to applaud your faithfulness and zeal.’ With such whimsicalities did Burns mix up the anxious, gloomy, and remorseful hours of this crisis of his life.

We obtain some insight into the prospects of Burns during November from a second letter of Dr Blacklock to Mr Lawrie, written on the 27th of the month. ‘Some time ago,’ says the blind bard, ‘I took the freedom of troubling you with a letter, acknowledging the favour of Mr Burns’s Poems; but at that time my mind was so full of their merit, that it entirely escaped my memory to inquire how much I was indebted for it; nor was this all, for instead of sending the letter by any of the channels to which I was directed, it was conveyed by the post, as I did not know where to find them’ [the aforesaid channels].¹ [Before Saturday last] ‘a report had reached me that a second edition of the Poems was projected, consisting, according to some, of twelve, or, according to others, of five thousand copies, at the expense of the gentlemen of Ayrshire, for the author’s benefit.’ Dr Blacklock feels disposed to remonstrate with the Ayrshire gentlemen for proposing so large an edition, as it might too long postpone another with additions; but he would fain offer them at the same time his ‘warmest acknowledgments for the generous concern which they discovered in favour of poetical merit, and for that exquisite taste by which it has been so warmly and justly distinguished. It has also been suggested to me,’ he adds, ‘that my former [letter] to you was intended for publication [prefixed to the new edition]. I have not the least recollection of what was said in that letter. It was an unpremeditated effusion of pleasure and gratitude. So far, however, as I remember, there occurs to me no reason for retracting

¹ This is a curious trait of past times. The postage of the celebrated letter of 4th September was fourpence; and the writer deems it necessary to apologise for not sending it by some private hand or a carrier.

anything which it contained; yet you must grant me that it is one thing to talk to a friend, and quite another to address the public. I must therefore, if the letter is really designed to be printed, earnestly solicit you to review it, and to erase or correct anything which may appear to be careless, bombastic, or hyperbolical.'

It had been thought of great consequence by Mr Lawrie, that the Poems should be shewn by Blacklock to Dr Blair, who might be considered as the highest tribunal of criticism then in Scotland. The blind doctor now tells his country friend: '*A priori*, I will venture to assure you that most, if not all of the Scots poems will fail of gaining his approbation. His taste is too highly polished, and his genius too regular in its emotions, to make allowances for the sallicies of a more impetuous ardour. Nor can he enter into the sentiment of Mr Pope—

“ Authors, 'tis true, may gloriously offend,
And faults commit true critics dare not mend.
From common rules with brave disorder part,
And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.”

So, the rumour of the new country edition had come to town, magnified from one to many thousands! The fact is important, as shewing the degree of wonder which had been raised in the capital itself regarding this singular ploughman and his effusions.

It is a curious memento of the eagerness with which the Kilmarnock volume was received, that no copy could be spared for the poet's own family at Mossgiel. Burns had always been free in communicating his best compositions to his mother and sisters; and the sisters would often gratify their mother by reading *Halloween*, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, and other favourite pieces, by the fireside. They all valued the author highly, both as an amiable son and brother, and for the brilliant talents he possessed. The mother had no drawback to her admiration of his genius, but the fear that the éclat attending it might make him reflect less on the Giver of all good gifts than was his duty. They now heard reports of his spreading fame, not with much surprise, for they had never deemed him a common part of creation, but with deep-cherished pride and pleasure. Yet so it was, that they never possessed his effusions in a printed form till the issue of the abundant second edition from Edinburgh in the ensuing year.

‘Imagination fondly stoops to trace’ the sensations of this worthy humble family, when it appeared that he, whom, in spite of all blotting and errors, they had ever truly loved, began to

think that there was in store for him some fate more gentle than that of an exile to the West Indies. It must not be supposed, however, that their feelings met with fluent expression, and that the poet received great re-assurance from them. In Scottish humble life, it is no uncommon thing for men and women of the strongest feelings to keep them locked up from all external show, or only to reveal them under great and casual excitement. A certain habitual soberness of manner, or, it may be, a kind of false shame, often prevents the interchange of all expression of even the most forcible affections, so that life may pass and love be only shewn in its appropriate actions and sacrifices. This was the case with all the Burnses, excepting Robert only, who never attempted to conceal any of his stronger feelings. Gilbert was of a particularly reserved nature; and yet even he kindled up at the prospect of his brother's rescue from the house of bondage. He took a leading part in urging him to try his fortune in Edinburgh, and did all he could to smooth the way for the journey.



A P P E N D I X.

No. 1 (p. 8).—BURNS'S ANCESTRY.

THE paternal genealogy of the poet has been ascertained for several generations by Dr James Burnes, late physician-general of the Bombay Army. The first of the family who can be spoken of with confidence is

(I.) Walter Burness, who died in depressed circumstances in the parish of Glenbervie, in Kincardineshire. His son,

(II.) Walter Burness, being left in indigent circumstances, learned a trade, and living industriously and frugally, saved a little money, by which he was enabled to take the farm of Bogjorgan, in Glenbervie parish, where he lived till his death. He had a son, William, who succeeded him in his farm, and who died in 1715. Walter had three other sons, two of whom settled in the parish of Benholm.

Connected with William's tenancy of Bogjorgan, a document has lately been discovered, which gives a very exact description of the accommodations required for a Scottish farmer at the beginning of the eighteenth century:—

'Ane note of the biging off Bogjorgine Belonging to William Stuart heritor thereoff given up be William Burnasse present tenant of the sd. Rowm and James Burnesse late possessor of the halff theroff upon the seventainth day of Jully 1705 years

Imp [a ffyr] houss consisting off thrie couples flour horses two taill postes ane midle wall with ane post ffrom the ground with ane rooff two pares in the syd with ane door bandet locked and bared and with ane window off two lightes bradet bandet and snecked with ane loume all to be sufficient

Item ane barne consisting of ffive couples four horses two taill postes ane Rooff thrie pares in the syd with ffor door locked and bandet and back door bared and steepled all to be sufficient

Item ane byre consisting of four couples two in the syd ane rooff with door and door cheikes bandet all to be sufficient

It is declared be both parties that if ther be no other inventur ffound betwixt this and Whytsonday nixt 1706 yeares that this shall be ane tr[ue] inventur off the said William Burness at his removell from the said Roum In witness . . .

. . . befor these witnesses Robt. Middletoun in Broombank and David Watson in Polburn wryter hereoff

Will. Stuart

1705

R. Midleton witnes

D. Watson witnes and wrytr,

W B'

(III.) James Burnes (so his name is spelt on his headstone in the church-yard of Glenbervie), another son of Walter, became tenant of the farm of Bralimmuir, which his descendants continued to occupy till after the beginning of the present century. He died in 1743, at the age of eighty-seven. In the time when James Burnes lived, the Highlanders still kept up their old habit of making predatory incursions into the Mearns. On one occasion, when some *catterans*, as they were called, made an approach to Bralimmuir, the goodman adopted the expedient of hiding his loose cash in the nave of an old cart-wheel, which usually lay in the *jaw-hole* before the door, to perform duty as a sort of stepping-stone. Both ends of the aperture being plugged up, and the wheel laid down, as usual, in the puddle, the catterans stepped upon it in entering the house, without the faintest suspicion of what they were treading upon. James Burnes had five sons, four of whom he set up in farms. One of them, named James, his successor in the farm, is well remembered in the country. In advanced life, he married for his second wife a girl so young and inexperienced, that she could not spin or reel, and her husband had to teach her. As he had a hesitation in his speech, the words he used on this occasion appeared the more ridiculous to his neighbours, and they are accordingly still cited occasionally by old people.¹ Another of the sons of the first James,

(IV.) Robert Burnes rented the farm of Clockenhill, of a very poor soil, on the lands of Dunnottar, the estate of the Earl Marischal, who was attainted in 1716 for his concern in the Rebellion. It is about six miles west of Stonehaven, on the Lawrencekirk road. He reared three sons and four daughters on very insufficient means, and found himself at length involved in poverty. The eldest son, James, born in 1717, went to Montrose, and attained a respectable position in society. His son James, writer in Montrose, corresponded with his cousin the poet, and acted towards him the part of a kind and generous friend. A third James, the son of the above, and at one time provost of Montrose, but who latterly lived in retirement in Edinburgh, was the father of the late Sir Alexander Burnes, author of *Travels in Bokhara*, 3 vols. (1833), and whose melancholy death at Cabul in November 1841 was the presage of so dire an event to the arms of England; likewise of Dr James Burnes, above mentioned. Another son of Robert Burnes in Clockenhill was Robert, who left the paternal home at the same time with his brother William, and served for some time as a gardener in England, but returned to Scotland, where he died in the house of his nephew, the Scottish bard, in 1789. The third son of Robert Burnes,

(V.) William Burness, born about 1721, migrated to Ayrshire, where he died in 1784. He was the father of

(VI.) ROBERT BURNS, the SCOTTISH POET.

¹ These particulars are communicated by James Smith, Esq., accountant, Aberdeen.

It is an interesting circumstance regarding the poet's grandfather, that, notwithstanding his poverty, he had a liberal sense of the value of education for his children. He, in conjunction with some of the neighbouring farmers, built a school-house on the farm of Clockenhill, and engaged a teacher. It was the first school built in that part of the country. It will be observed that this was precisely the conduct afterwards pursued by his son William Burnes at Alloway; so that two generations of our poet's family had distinguished themselves by what was even for Scotland an extraordinary as well as most honourable sacrifice in behalf of education. The lease of Clockenhill expired about 1740; two of the farmer's sons, including William, then a mere youth, intended to renew the *tack*, but it was taken over their heads. They were thus put out of their little possessions; their stock was sold to pay their debts; the old man retired with his three unmarried daughters to a small farm called Denside, in the same parish, while the sons went off to push their fortunes with empty pockets.

There is a story which would seem to throw the date of the family sufferings for the Stuarts back into the seventeenth century. The first Walter Burness is represented as having been in reality named Walter Campbell. He is described as having been originally proprietor of a small domain in Argyleshire, called Burnhouse. It is stated that, having offended his chief, the Duke (Earl) of Argyle, by siding with the cause of the Stuarts at the Revolution, 'he was, much about the time of the noted massacre of Glencoe, obliged to abandon his native country, and wander to the Lowlands as a fugitive, accompanied by his only son, Walter, then a boy.' He dropped the name of Campbell, and was known by that of Burness—a corruption of Burnhouse, the place of his birth. He settled in the parish of Glenbervie, and there died. Dr James Burnes was so well convinced of the truth of this story, as to deem himself entitled to apply to the Lord Lyon's College for a patent of arms, which was granted to him, founded partly upon those of the family of Campbell.

From a privately printed brochure, prepared by Dr Burnes, it appears that this family tradition was reported in 1824 by John Burness of Stonehaven, a curious original, who had some share of his cousin's gift of verse, and was the author of a comic production, called *Thrummie Cap*. John Burness had heard the recital from the Rev. Alexander Greig, Episcopal minister in Stonchaven, whose mother's sister was the wife of William Burness, the grandson of the second Walter, and who died in 1793 at the age of eighty-six. Mr Greig had his chapel converted into a stable, and himself suffered six months' imprisonment, during the dark days of the Scottish Episcopal Church succeeding the insurrection of 1745. The story, however we are to receive it, requires at least some correction in point of date, for it is inadmissible that the grandfather of a person born in 1656, which was the case of James Burnes

of Bralinmuir, could be liable after the Revolution to change his residence on account of his political principles. If he had been represented as suffering in the troubles of the period between 1638 and 1660, belief would have been attended with less difficulty. It is, however, not impossible that, in the course of its transmission from mouth to mouth, the tradition suffered to this extent, and that the time of the Civil War was that actually referred to.

On the other hand, it is certain that, however Walter Burness acquired his name, it was one which did not take its rise in that manner, for it occurs in public documents of the age of Bruce. What is more to the purpose, the name of John Burns, servitor to Sir Alexander Strachan of Thornton, knight-baronet, appears as witness to a disposition granted in 1637 by the Earl of Traquair, Treasurer of Scotland, in the name of the Scottish Exchequer. Thornton is situated within a few miles of Bogjorgan and Bralinmuir, on the estate of Inchbreck, 'whence,' says Dr Burnes, 'our family is known to have come.' Our finding a Burns in the district in 1637, certainly reduces the likelihood of the family being Argyleshire refugees of the time of the Civil War. It must at the same time be admitted as not impossible, that the supposed Walter Campbell might be the more ready to adopt his territorial appellation as a surname in consequence of finding men of that name already in the country. A curious fact connected with this subject, is the mention by Horace Walpole of a correspondence carried on in 1742 by John Duke of Argyle with the head of the House of Stuart, under the pseudonyme of *Burnus* (so Walpole spells it). One could almost be disposed to question if there was not some predilection on the part of the Campbell family for Burnhouse, Burn'se, or Burness, as a subordinate appellative, to be used on occasions of difficulty, when their own name was not presentable.

Regarding the Cavalier character of Burns's ancestors, it is to be observed that he has affirmed it in the most direct manner. His first reference to the subject occurs in the original manuscript of his autobiography addressed to Dr Moore. There, after stating that his father was from the north of Scotland, he spoke of his ancestors as renting lands of the noble family of the Keiths, Earls Marischal, and as having had the honour of sharing their fate. 'I do not,' continues he, 'use the word honour with any reference to political principles; loyal and disloyal I take to be merely relative terms in that ancient and formidable court, known in this country by the name of club-law, where the right is always with the strongest. But those who dare welcome ruin, and shake hands with infamy, for what they sincerely believe to be the cause of God or their king, are, as Mark Antony says in Shakspeare of Brutus and Cassius, honourable men. I mention this circumstance, because it threw my father on the world at large.' Again, in his address to

William Tytler, he says with equal directness, speaking of the name of Stuart :

‘ My fathers that name have revered on a throne,
My fathers have fallen to right it ;
Those fathers would spurn their degenerate son,
That name should he scoffingly slight it.’

Afterwards, writing to Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable (Dec. 16, 1789), he says : ‘ With your ladyship I have the honour to be connected by one of the strongest and most endearing ties in the whole moral world—common sufferers in a cause where even to be unfortunate is glorious, the cause of heroic loyalty ! Though my fathers had not illustrious honours and vast properties to hazard in the contest—though they left their humble cottages only to add so many units more to the unnoticed crowd that followed their leaders—yet what they could they did, and what they had they lost : with unshaken firmness, and unconcealed political attachments, they shook hands with ruin for what they esteemed the cause of their king and country.’

What Gilbert Burns says on the other side is as follows :—‘ I do not know how my brother could be misled in the account he has given of the Jacobitism of his ancestors. I believe the Earl Marischal forfeited his title and estates in 1715, before my father was born ; and among a collection of parish certificates in his possession, I have read one, stating that the bearer had no concern in the late wicked rebellion.’

It cannot fail to strike the reader that Gilbert here contradicts something which the poet did not assert. The question is not as to the father, but as to ‘ fathers,’ meaning evidently more remote predecessors. William Burness might have been innocent of this honourable guilt, while his father was not. James Hogg reported his having heard from an old Kincardineshire gentleman named Hutchard, ‘ that Burns’s grandfather and uncles were out in both rebellions, and that it rendered them obnoxious to the Whigs of that country, and reduced them in circumstances.’¹ There is certainly no great improbability in this statement, but rather the reverse, for the natal district of the family was remarkable for the attachment of the people to the House of Stuart. The very laws of the country placed Robert Burnes of Clockenhill, like all the other tenants of the Earl Marischal, under an obligation to follow his lord to the field.² Something to the same effect as Mr Hutchard’s statement, only a little more general, was lately reported to Dr Burnes by a

¹ Hogg and Motherwell’s edition of Burns, v. 23.

² Even if he evaded this rule (which was not abrogated till 1748), he might well suffer in a different way in subsequent years, as the tenant of a farm which had been transferred from the care of the *natural landlord* to that of an unrelenting government commissioner. That he did so suffer, and thus fall into embarrassments, is an averment which has reached us from among his descendants in the north.

man named Taylor, eighty-seven years of age, residing at Drumlithie. After saying that he had heard that the original name of the family was Campbell, and that it had been changed *in consequence of a duel*, Taylor stated it as being notorious in his young days that ‘the Burnesses had been out for the Stuarts.’ They were chiefly, he added, of the Episcopal communion. Another circumstance favourable to the poet’s account of the family, is its having such a person as the Rev. Mr Greig connected with it. On the whole, considering how weak is the contradiction brought forward by Gilbert, I see little reason to disbelieve that the poet’s grandfather and grand-uncles were *out* in the affair of 1715–16, in attendance on the standard of the Earl Marischal. The fact was perhaps imparted as a family secret by William Burness to Robert, in consequence of the interest which the young bard took in such matters, and the sympathy which he felt with the ruined cause of the Stuarts; while to Gilbert, whose prepossessions were of an opposite complexion, the old man might not feel the same provocation to be communicative.

1853.—A descendant of one of James of Bralinmuir’s sons, the Rev. D. Burness, Wiston, Lanarkshire, adduces reasons for doubting that Robert of Clockenhill, or any of his brothers, had a hand in the affair of 1715, or were at all Jacobitically inclined. This Robert, he says, was a Presbyterian; and the names of his children, from 1725 to 1732, are registered as having been baptised by the parish minister. One of his brothers, Janies, who succeeded the father in Bralinmuir, appears in 1723 as an elder of the parish of Glenbervie; so that he also is to be regarded as a Presbyterian. George, another brother, appears as witness at the Presbyterian baptising of Robert’s children—which Mr D. B. thinks he never could have been if an Episcopalian. William, the fourth brother, can be traced as having never suffered in fortune from connection with the Stuart cause, nor anything else. Thomas, the fifth son, was only ten years of age in 1715, and dead before 1745. Thus Mr D. B. regards the bard’s grandfather and grand-uncles as persons not at all likely to have been engaged in either of the rebellions.

On the whole, it now seems to me most probable, that the imputed Cavalier character of Burns’s ancestry mainly arose from the facts, whatever they were, which gave rise to the story of the Argyleshire refugee Campbell. If the first Walter was a Campbell and a Royalist in the time of the Civil War, it is pretty certain that his native district would be no place for him. It might be some faint echo of this family legend which the poet heard, and it might be by some mistake on his part, that the period was changed to the eighteenth-century rebellions, and the circumstances put into a connection with the fortunes of the Marischal family.

No. 2 (p. 21).—BURNS'S MOTHER.

A few further particulars of the poet's mother, from the recollection of his youngest sister, may be thought worthy of preservation, as characteristic of the old peasant-life of Scotland.

Gilbert Brown, of Craigenton, in Carrick, was thrice married, and the poet's mother, Agnes Brown, was his eldest child by the first marriage. She was only nine years of age when her mother died, leaving four younger children. When the mother's death was looked for, a sister came to see her, and was surprised to find how cheerful she was. 'Are you not sorry to leave your husband and children?' asked the sister. 'No,' was the answer; 'I leave my children to the care of God, and Gilbert will soon get another wife.' The father, being of ultra-frugal habits, kept all his servants engaged in the farm and house work; so that the charge of the children fell to the care of the eldest, herself a mere child, but no doubt forced into a premature thoughtfulness by the extraordinary circumstances.

Agnes had been taught to read her Bible, and repeat the Psalms, by a weaver in the village, who kept such young pupils beside his loom as he sat at work. At her mother's death, this kind of education came to a stop, and it was never resumed. The mother of Burns was never able even to write her own name. Her mind was shrewd and intelligent, but unavoidably warped with prejudices, though not to a serious extent.

After her father's second marriage, Agnes Brown was sent to live with her mother's mother, a good worthy soul, who in her younger days had sheltered the persecuted Covenanters. When this old person was more than ordinarily pleased with her grand-daughter's doings at the wheel, she gave her, as her *ten hours* or lunch, a piece of brown bread, with a piece of white as *kitchen* to it, both being only varieties of oatmeal-cake.

While here, Agnes occasionally acted as *gaudsman* or horse-driver to the ploughman, William Nelson, and assisted him to thrash the corn with the flail. They became attached, and were engaged for seven years, when, at the mature age of twenty-six, she gave him up, in consequence of a moral lapse on his part, of the kind most apt to alienate the affections of a pure-minded woman. Soon after, William Burness happened to meet her at a Maybole fair. He had been well affected to a girl he used to meet frequently at Alloway Mill; and he had kept a letter addressed to that maiden for some time locked up in his trunk. He was now so much pleased with Agnes, that immediately on returning home, he took the epistle from his trunk and burnt it. After he had been Agnes's devoted admirer for a twelvemonth, they were married, and little more than another year made them the parents of the most remarkable man of his age in Scotland.

Mrs Burness had a fine complexion, with pale red hair, and

beautiful dark eyes. She was of a neat small figure, extremely active and industrious—naturally cheerful, but in later life possessed by anxieties, no doubt a consequence of the life of hardships and difficulties through which it had been her lot to pass. She sang very well, and had a never-failing store of old ballads and songs, on which her poetical son must have fed in his boyhood. As a trait of the life of Mrs Burness in the days of sadness which preceded her husband's death, Mrs Begg remembers the old man coming in one day from sowing, very weary. He had used all the thrashed-up grain, and was now desirous of preparing some for dinner to the horses; but his worthy helpmate, on seeing his fatigued state, insisted that he should refresh himself by a rest, while she herself would see that the beasts were duly cared for. The heroic little woman then went to the barn with her servant, Lizzy Paton, and the two soon had the necessary corn for the horses both thrashed and winnowed. Such was the household of the youthful Burns. Who can but regret that the lot of such a family was not from the first a kindlier one!

The low deal-chair on which Agnes Brown nursed all her offspring—a very interesting relic of a poet's mother—is preserved by Sir James Stuart Menteath, Bart., on whose paternal estate she lived many years.

No. 3 (p. 6).—THE BOOKS READ BY BURNS IN EARLY LIFE.

It will be observed, from the various recitals regarding Burns's early years, that he had had access to a considerable number of books in his boyhood and youth. A distinct catalogue of them may serve to give a tolerably clear idea of the advantages of this kind which he possessed. It must be seen that a person having in early life so many books at his command, and who really read and studied them, could not be considered as an uneducated man.

IN EARLY BOYHOOD.

We may place first in the roll, the books which every child attending school in Scotland is sure to find in his hands:—

The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly.
The Bible.

Other school-books:—

A Spelling Book.
Fisher's English Grammar.
Mason's English Collection.

IN LATER BOYHOOD.

Borrowed from Mr Murdoch :—

The Life of Hannibal.

Borrowed at a later period from Kilpatrick, the blacksmith :—

The Life of Sir William Wallace. [Hamilton of Gilbertfield's reduction of the poem of Henry the Minstrel.]

Given by Mr Murdoch as presents :—

A Compendium of English Grammar.

The School for Love, a comedy translated from the French.

Borrowed by William Burness for his children :—

Salmon's Geographical Grammar.

Derham's Physico-Theology.

Ray's Wisdom of God in the Works of Creation.

Given by a maternal uncle :—

The Ready Reckoner.

A Collection of Letters.

Borrowed from Mrs Paterson of Ayr :—

The Spectator.

Pope's Translation of Homer.

Borrowed from Mr Hamilton of Bourtreehill's gardener :—

A volume of English history (period of James I. and Charles I.)

Otherwise borrowed :—

Ferdinand Count Fathom.

Two volumes of Peregrine Pickle.

Otherwise obtained, and mostly the property of William Burness :—

Bayle's Lectures. [There appears to be no such book as Bayle's Lectures. It is probably a misprint for the well-known Boyle Lecture Sermons on Natural and Revealed Religion, abridged by Gilbert Burnet, 4 vols. 8vo.]

Stackhouse's History of the Bible.

The Spectator.

Taylor on the Doctrine of Original Sin.

Hervey's Meditations.

Justice's British Gardener's Directory.

Tull and Dickson on Agriculture.

Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding.

The Pantheon.

The Works of Allan Ramsay.

A Select Collection of English Songs [The Lark, 2 vols.]

The Works of Pope.

Several Plays of Shakspeare.

No. 4 (p. 39).—‘MY NANNIE, O.’

It can be, in general, a matter of very little importance to the public, indeed little more than a gratification of curiosity, to ascertain upon which of the rustic maidens within his observation Burns composed any of his songs. Sometimes, however, a peculiarity of Burns's temper and tastes, or some circumstance affecting the texture of his life, may be concerned, and then the subject is not without its value.

In Wood's *Songs of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 3 vols., 1849) there is a note on this subject, in which a statement originating in Cunningham's edition respecting the song of *Wandering Willie* is contradicted, and the writer then adverts in the following terms to *My Nannie, O*:—‘A hunt was made for a heroine by an annotator, when it was discovered that a servant-girl, named Agnes Fleming, had lived near Lochlea at the time that William Burness occupied that farm. This evidence was thought quite sufficient. No more was sought. The note was written—the affair was settled,’ &c. The writer goes on to say: ‘Who, until some fifty years after the poet's death, ever heard of his making love to Agnes Fleming either in prose or verse? Then was Nannie disintombed, that she might, like an Egyptian mummy, be embalmed in the poet's verse, merely because she had the good-luck to be *kirsened* Nannie or Agnes.’

I know nothing of the hunt here spoken of; but certainly the writer is mistaken in thinking that the assignment of this honour to Agnes Fleming was unheard of till fifty years after the poet's death. Mr George Thomson, in 1819, used some diligence in ascertaining from Mr Gilbert Burns and Mrs Robert Burns the names of such persons as they believed to have been contemplated by the poet in writing his songs. In a letter of Gilbert (Grant's Braes, 3d June 1819) to Mr Thomson, now before me, I find the following:—‘*My Nannie, O*, was a farmer's daughter in Torbolton parish, *the name Fleming*.’ Mr Thomson published this statement, which was subsequently adopted by Cunningham and other editors.

The writer of the note in *Wood's Songs* goes on to argue, that Burns wrote *My Nannie, O*, in honour of Peggy Thomson, the Kirkoswald fillette, but without advancing any stronger proof than the fact, that the poet did love Peggy, which he avers was never the case of Agnes. I find that Mrs Begg also is of opinion, that Peggy Thomson was the theme of *My Nannie, O*. It may be so; but the writer in Wood assumes too much in saying, that there is no evidence for Agnes Fleming having ever been loved by the poet. Gilbert, after mentioning her name, goes on to say, ‘to whom the poet paid some of that roving attention which he was continually devoting to some one.’ The averment of the brother and bosom-friend of Burns must be next, in a case of this kind, to his own.

It is admitted on all hands, that Agnes Fleming was not a beauty.

She in this respect illustrates the statement of Gilbert with regard to the female subjects of his brother's verses, that 'there was often a great disparity between his fair captivator and her attributes.' One cannot but experience a twinge in contrasting the exquisite picture of loveliness conveyed in the song with the reality; yet, under the aspect which the question has taken, I am bound to add the following from Gilbert's letter, by way of supporting what seems to have the superior evidence in its favour:—'Her charms were indeed mediocre; but what she had were sexual, which was indeed the characteristic of the greater part of the poet's mistresses. He was no Platonic lover, whatever he might pretend or suppose of himself.'

Agnes Fleming was at one time a servant in the house of Mr Gavin Hamilton, by whose family she is remembered as a plain-looking woman, but of good figure and carriage. The poor woman herself never made any pretensions regarding this specimen of divine poesy, beyond saying that the bard once told her he had written a song about her.

No. 5 (p. 92).—TORBOLTON MASON LODGES.

There is some obscurity about Burns's masonic affiliation; but the following appears to be as nearly as possible the true series of circumstances:—

The St James's Torbolton Lodge, No. 178, was constituted by a charter from Kilwinning in 1771. A number of members left the St James's in 1773, and formed themselves, with some new entrants, into the St David's Lodge. A union of the two took place on the 25th June 1781, and it was agreed that the one lodge then constituted should bear the name of St David's; probably a compliment or concession designed to appease the schismatic body. Burns was admitted an apprentice in this sole Torbolton Lodge, styled St David's, on the 4th July, and passed and raised on the 1st of October 1781, and these transactions are recorded in the books peculiar to the distinct St David's Lodge. A new disruption took place in June 1782, and the separating body then re-constituted the St James's Lodge. Burns was of this party, and thenceforward his name is found only in the books of the distinct St James's Lodge. It would therefore appear, that though entered in what was nominally the St David's Lodge, he does not properly belong to the detached lodge now bearing that name, but to the lodge distinctly called the St James's, which he has immortalised in verse.

Somewhat unexpectedly, indeed, his admission into the Dumfries St Andrew's Lodge, on the 27th December 1788, is signified in the book of that body in the following terms:—'The Brethren having celebrated the anniversary of St John in the usual manner, and Brother Robt. Burns in Ailliesland, of St David's Strabolton Lodge No. 178, being present, the Lodge unanimously assumed him a

Member of the Lodge, being a Master masson, and he subcribed the regulations as a member. (Signed) SIM. MACKENZIE.'

It might have been expected that Burns would describe himself as belonging to the St James's Lodge. Possibly, however, it was neecessary to mention the name of the lodge in which he was entered: or it might be a mistake of the Dumfries secretary, putting down St David's for St James's—a circumstance the more probable, as No. 178 is the number of the St James's Lodge, while that of the St David's is 174.

No. 6 (p. 118).—THE ROCKING-SONG.

It has lately been discovered that Lapraik could not justly pretend to be the author of the song *When I upon thy bosom lean*. In the *Weekly Magazine*, October 14, 1773, is a piece, entitled *Lines Addressed by a Husband to his Wife after being Six Years Married, and sharing a great variety of Fortune together*, and running as follows:—

' When on thy bosom I recline,
Enraptured still to call thee mine,
 To call thee mine for life;
I glory in the sacred ties,
Which modern wits and fools despise,
 Of husband and of wife.

One mutual flame inspires our bliss;
The tender look, the melting kiss,
 Even years have not destroyed;
Some sweet sensation ever new
Springs up and proves the maxim true,
 Chaste love can ne'er be cloyed.

Have I a wish—'tis all for thee;
Hast thou a wish—'tis all for me;
 So soft our moments move,
That numbers look with ardent gaze,
Well pleased to see our happy days,
 And bid us live and love!

If care arise (and cares will come)
Thy bosom is my softest home,
 I lull me there to rest;
And is there aught disturbs my fair,
I bid her sigh out all her care,
 And lose it in my breast.

Have I a joy—'tis all her own,
Or hers and mine are all but one,
 Our hearts are so entwined,
That like the ivy round the tree,
Bound up in closest amity,
 'Tis death to be disjoined.

There cannot be a doubt that this rustic bard had fallen upon these verses, and, ignorant of the principles of literary morality, deemed himself at liberty to make a song, assumedly his own, out of them, and to publish this without any acknowledgment of the source of his ideas. His song, as here printed, appeared in a volume of ‘Poems,’ which he published at Kilmarnock in 1788. Burns, who probably never knew or suspected the plagiarism, afterwards dressed up the song as follows for *Johnson’s Museum* :—

‘ When I upon thy bosom lean,
 And fondly clasp thee a’ my ain,
 I glory in the sacred ties
 That made us ane wha ance were twain :
 A mutual flame inspires us baith,
 The tender look, the melting kiss ;
 Even years can not destroy our love,
 But only gie us change o’ bliss.

 Ha’e I a wish, ’tis a’ for thee ;
 I ken thy wish is me to please :
 Our moments pass sae smooth away,
 That numbers on us look and gaze ;
 Weel pleased they see our happy days,
 Nor Envy’s sel’ finds aught to blame ;
 And aye when weary cares arise,
 Thy bosom still shall be my hame.

 I’ll lay me there and tak my rest,
 And if that anght disturbs my dear,
 I’ll bid her laugh her cares away,
 And beg her not to drap a tear :
 Ha’e I a joy, ’tis a’ her ain,
 United still her heart and mine ;
 They’re like the woodbine round the tree,
 That’s twined till death shall them disjoin.’

No. 7 (p. 122).—TAYLOR ON ORIGINAL SIN.

The title of this work is, *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* : By John Taylor. The first edition was published in 1740. The third, dated 1750, is an 8vo volume of nearly 500 pages.

In the first part, the author starts with the admission, that ‘all truth necessary to salvation is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.’ He immediately adds: ‘As for human wisdom and knowledge, I ought to value it, in religious matters, just so much, and so far only, as it serves to unfold the mind and meaning of God in the Scriptures; in the interpretation of which we ought not to admit anything contradictory to the common sense and understanding of mankind.’

He then proceeds to say, that there are no more than five places

in the Bible where the consequences of the first sin are certainly spoken of. I. Gen. ii. 17. ‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’ He argues that the punishment here threatened is simply the loss of that life which God had lately conferred upon Adam. He remarks, that there is not one word here relating to Adam’s posterity. II. Gen. iii. 7–24. ‘And the eyes of them both were opened,’ &c. In this text the commentator sees only that, Adam having sinned, and fallen under guilt, shame, and fear, ‘God graciously proposed to continue his race, to appoint his Son, the Messiah, to oppose the kingdom of the Devil, now begun by the sin of Adam, but withal subjected the man to sorrow, labour, and death.’ III. 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22. ‘For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’ ‘From this place,’ he says, ‘we cannot conclude that any other evil or death came upon mankind in consequence of Adam’s first transgression, besides that death from which mankind shall be delivered at the resurrection; whatever that death be.’ IV. Rom. v. 12–19. ‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,’ &c. The author acknowledges that this text is more difficult; but after a long and subtle argument, he arrives at this conclusion, that, ‘furthermore, God in Christ hath bestowed upon us mercy and gifts, privileges and advantages, both in this and a future world, abundantly beyond the reversing of any evils we are subject to in consequence of Adam’s sin.’ V. 1 Tim. ii. 14. On this text the author makes no remarks.

The second part of the work is devoted to an examination of the principal passages of Scripture which have been applied in support of the common scheme of original sin, and have not been discussed in the first part. The passages examined are those adduced as proofs for the propositions laid down in the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly. After discussing the whole, he says: ‘I cannot see that we have advanced one step further than where we were at the conclusion of the first part—namely, that the consequences of Adam’s first transgression upon us are labour, sorrow, and mortality.’ He elsewhere adds: ‘And that thereupon a new dispensation, abounding with grace, was erected in a Redeemer.’

It would be beyond my province to enter more largely into the subject of this book, or to trace the discussions arising from it; but as it was one which is understood to have exercised some influence, at least for a time, over the mind of our great national poet, I thought it well to shew the principal conclusions which it endeavours to establish.

NO. 8 (p. 138).—GAVIN HAMILTON AND THE MAUCHLINE KIRK-SESSION.

The parochial persecution of Gavin Hamilton was not now terminated. On the 27th October (1785), the Session resolved not to erase the minutes of which he had complained, ‘because he continues to give more and more offence by neglect of public ordinances, and that in disobedience to the recommendation of the reverend presbytery.’

On the 2d of August 1787, the Session is informed that Gavin Hamilton, on the last Lord’s Day, caused his servant, James Brayan, to dig some potatoes in his garden. By a letter of the 8th September, Mr Hamilton makes the following explanation:—‘I was walking with my children in the forenoon in the garden, when some of them petitioned for a few new potatoes, having got none that season. I considered the request as so very reasonable, particularly from those who made it, that I did not scruple to listen to their demands; nor had I an idea that raising a few potatoes in a private garden would have given offence to any person, more than pulling any garden stuff.’

In their answer, the Session express doubt of the fact of the children having had none that season, ‘being informed that there were new potatoes in his house some days before that Sabbath, for proving whereof, if necessary, witnesses are named.’ Some time after, they find that two and a half rows of potatoes, each row ten or eleven feet long, were dug, and that the child was employed to gather them; they therefore pass sentence, ordering Mr Hamilton to appear and profess repentance. How this matter terminated as to Mr Hamilton, does not appear; but on the 13th January 1788, James Brayan stood a rebuke for having dug the potatoes.

There seems to have been a degree of religious zeal and scrupulosity at Mauchline beyond what was common. In the course of the general election of 1790, the kirk-session declined to allow a precept of the sheriff to be read from the precentor’s desk ‘before the forenoon’s blessing;’ and for this, as an act in contempt of court, the minister, elders, and clerk were fined £5, besides paying £3, 3s. of expenses.

On zeal beyond discretion how painful often the comment afforded by the infirmity of our common nature! Sad to tell, of the three zealous elders constituting, along with the minister, the court by which Mr Hamilton was prosecuted, and Burns rebuked, one put a period to his own life, and another died in a drunken fit after becoming a convicted larcenist.

‘December 12, 1791.—Died at Mauchline, the Rev. William Auld, in the eighty-third year of his age, and fiftieth of his ministry, universally beloved and regretted.’—*Newspaper Obit.*

No. 9 (p. 280).—THE METRES OF BURNS.

The English reader will not have failed to remark, that some of the forms of verse employed by Burns are different from any in use among southern poets. In these matters, the Ayrshire bard was of course led by the fashions set before him by the poets with whose works he was familiar. He had studied Fergusson and Ramsay with veneration. In their volumes it is easy to trace the models of versification which Burns followed, and in many instances, as has been noted, the particular productions which he condescended in some degree to imitate.

The stanza which, from the frequency with which he uses it, may be presumed to have been his favourite, is the peculiar one employed in the *Verses to a Mouse*. By modern Scottish bards it had been largely employed for comic subjects: it was reserved for Burns to shew that it was not incapable of expressing solemn feeling and energetic description: the bard of Rydal Mount afterwards gave it the stamp of his approbation. Fergusson, the immediate predecessor of Burns, found many poems in this stanza in the volumes of Ramsay. Ramsay found it in use with his senior contemporary, Hamilton of Gilbertfield; and Hamilton, again, had before him several poems of the same form, which had been produced before the middle of the seventeenth century by Robert Semple of Beltrees. It is curious to find at that early period burlesque elegies on the noted piper Habbie Simpson, and 'Sandy Briggs, butler to the Laird of Kilbarchan,' exactly resembling that of Burns on Tam Samson. For example, from the elegy on Briggs:—

' Wha 'll jaw ale on my drouthy tongue,	pour
To cool the heat o' light and lung?	
Wha 'll bid me, when the kail-bell's rung,	dinner-bell
To board me speed?	
Wha 'll set me by the barrel bung,	
Since Sandy's dead?	
Wha 'll set me dribbling by the tap?	
While winking I begin to nap,	
Then lay me down, and weel me hap,	cover
And bin' my head.	
I needna think to get ae drap,	
Since Sandy's dead.	
Well did the master-cook and he	
Wi' giff-gaff courtesies agree,	reciprocal
While tears as fast as kitchen-fee	
Dрап frae his head.	
Alake a day! though kind to me,	
Yet now he's dead!'	

It has been thought that Semple was the inventor of this stanza, but it may be traced in slightly different forms amongst the writers of

the preceding century. We find Sir Richard Maitland employing one only differing from it in the want of a line—which of course it was easy for a subsequent poet to add. Sir Richard, who died in 1589 at the age of ninety, has occasion to console himself for his want of the vigour of youth :—

soldiering stuff

shoulder-blade

‘ My horse, my harness, and my spear,
And all other, my hosting gear,
May now be sauld ;
I am not able for the weir,
I am sae auld.

When young men comis frae the green,
Playand at the foot-ball had been,
With broken spauld,
I thank my God I want my e'en,
And am sae auld.’

Sir Richard himself gives an example of the full form of the stanza, only with a fifth rhyme in the second last line. He is bewailing ‘ the Evils of New-found Laws :’—

‘ Lord punish them that aye pretendit
For to do wrang, or to defend it ;
In haste let them be apprehendit,
And thole the law,
Or gar them mend it,
Whom they offendit
In deed or saw.’

When we go seventy years further back, we find the germ of the stanza in a peculiar group of the poems of Dunbar, where rhymed couplets were somewhat conceitedly associated with alternate rhymes. Thus, for example, in his *Tidings fra the Session* :—

pledge

‘ Some, biding the law, lays land in wed ;
Some super-expended goes to his bed ;
Some speeds, for he in court has means ;
Some of partiality compleins,
How feid and favour flemes discretion ;
Some speaks full fair, and falsely feigns :
Sic tidings heard I at the Session.’

Beyond the commencement of the 16th century, it does not seem possible to trace this stanza even in its most rudimentary state.

Another of the favourite metres of Burns, is that employed in his first *Epistle to Davie*—a remarkably complicated and difficult stanza, but which our poet had so completely mastered through his extraordinary command of language, that he would employ it in scribbling a note on the most trivial business to a friend. This stanza was adopted by Ramsay in a poem entitled *The Vision*, which he wrote in the style of a former age, and passed off in his *Evergreen* as a genuine production of the elder Muse. Ramsay found his model in the well-known poem styled *The Cherry and the Slae*, by Alexander Montgomery, who flourished in the reign of James VI. This is an

allegorical piece of somewhat tedious length, but in a style of poesy far from vulgar or tame. For example—

'The air was sober, soft, and sweet,
But misty vapours, wind, and weet,
Bot quiet, calm, and clear;
To foster Flora's fragrant flowers,
Whereon Apollo's paramours
Had trickled many a tear;
The which like silver shakers shined,
Embroiding Beauty's bed;
Wherewith their heavy heads declined,
All in May's colours clad:
Some knopping, some dropping
Of balmy liquor sweet;
Excelling in smelling
Through Phœbus' wholesome heat.'

The stanza was used by a poet who lived before the days of Montgomery, though only, as far as is known, in one piece. This piece is *Ane Ballat of the Creation of the World*, written by Sir Richard Maitland. It recites the facts of the Scripture narrative with little embellishment and much simplicity, as is well exemplified in a verse apostrophising the unfortunate mother of the human race:—

'O delicate dame, with ears bent,
That harkened to that false serpent,
Thy banes we may sair ban.
Without excuse thou art to blame,
Thou justly hast obtineid that name—
The very Wo of Man.
With tears we may bewail and greet weep
That wicked time and tide,
When Adam was caused to sleep,
And thou ta'en of his side:
No sleeping, but weeping
Thy seed has fund sinsyne;
Thy eating and sweating
Is turned to wo and pyne.'

As Maitland wrote this curious poem 'to the tune of the Banks of Helicon,' we may safely assume that there was at least one previous example of the stanza. It occurs not, however, in any of the poems of Dunbar, Douglas, Henryson, or other of the early 'Makars.'

A third stanza worthy of special notice, is that employed in the *Holy Fair* and *Ordination*. Here Burns directly imitated Fergusson's *Leith Races* and *Hallow Fair*; but the stanza was first brought into vogue by Ramsay, in the continuation which he wrote of *Christ's Kirk of the Green*. The poem last mentioned was published a little before the time when Ramsay flourished, by Bishop Gibson, being derived from a manuscript of the sixteenth century. It has been supposed by some to be a composition of King James I., by others of James V.; but without the slightest grounds beyond conjecture for

either supposition. It is to be observed, that the form of the stanza was slightly altered by Ramsay, and with an improvement in both sound and pith. Of the original, the following verse from the description of a village brawl may serve as an example:—

'The miller was of manly mak,
To meet him was nae mows ;
There durst not ten come him to tak,
Sae knoited he their pows :
The bushment hale about him brak,
And bickered him with bows ;
Syne traiterously, behind his back,
They hewit him on the houghs,
Behind,
At Christ's Kirk of the Green that day.'

A poem, apparently of earlier date, entitled *Peebles to the Play*, is in the same stanza, with a slight difference in the termination, the characteristic phrase 'that day' being wanting. This has also been supposed, but on very slight grounds, to be the composition of James I. of Scotland. Though apparently a production of the fifteenth century, it was not published till 1785, and it was probably unknown to Burns at the time when his volume was published.

No. 10 (p. 293).—SALE OF THE KILMARNOCK EDITION.

The original of the account of John Wilson of Kilmarnock for the printing of Burns's Poems, with a list of subscribers, or rather of persons to whom Wilson gave out copies on account of the author, is in possession of Robert Cole, Esq., of 52 Upper Norton Place, London.

It first gives particulars as to the disposal of 70 copies by Mr Wilson himself, at 3s. per copy. Among the names occur those of Mr W. Parker, Mr Samson (hero of the Elegy), Mr Ralph Sellars (a member of the Torbolton Bachelors' Club), Mr Rankine [of Adamhill?], and Mr John Neilson (5 copies). Mr Aiken, of Ayr, gets one copy on the 31st of July—12 copies on the 5th August, 20 on the 10th, 40 on the 12th, 36 on the 14th, and 36 more on the 16th; being nearly one-fourth of the whole impression disposed of in a few days by this zealous friend of the author. Gilbert Burns states that Mr William Parker of Kilmarnock was a subscriber for 35 copies of the first edition of his brother's poems. This is not confirmed by the present paper; but Mr Robert Muir, another Kilmarnock friend of the bard, and one of whom he speaks after his death in the tenderest terms, obtains on the 2d August 2 copies, and between that and the 17th, 70 more. Perhaps Gilbert has inadvertently given Parker's name instead of Muir's.

'Mr Smith, Mauchline'—doubtless the bosom-friend of the poet—obtains on the 4th August 1 copy, and on the 8th, 40. Mr

Hamilton on the 18th obtains 40 copies. David Sillar seems to have disposed of 14; Mr Kennedy, Dumfries House, of 20; John Logan, Esq., of Laight, of 20; Mr Walter Morton, Cumnock, of 6; Mr Niven, Maybole (the 'Willie' of the Kirkoswald school-days), of 7; Mr Gilbert Burns, of 70; Mr M'Whinnie, of 20. Burns himself receives a copy on the 3d of August; another on the 4th; one more on the 5th.

On August 28, less than a month after the volume was ready, 599 had been disposed of, and there then remained on hand only 15.

The account of Wilson for printing is as follows:—

Mr ROBERT BURNS,		To JOHN WILSON, Dr.
Aug. 28, 1786.	Printing 15 sheets at 19s.,	£14 5 0
	19 Reams 13 quires paper at 17s.,	16 4 0
	Carriage of the paper,	0 8 9
	Stitching 612 copies in blue paper at 1½d.,	4 9 3
		£35 17 0
Aug. 19.	By cash,	£6 3 0
" 28.	" "	14 13 0
	By 70 copies,	10 10 0

		31 6 0
	By 9 copies,	£4 11 0
		1 7 0
		£3 4 0
Oct. 6th.	By cash in full,	3 4 0
Kilmarnock,	Settled the above account,	

JOHN WILSON.

It appears that Mr Wilson had here, by an error in his arithmetic, undercharged the poet ten shillings—the second item in the account being properly £16, 14s., instead of £16, 4s.

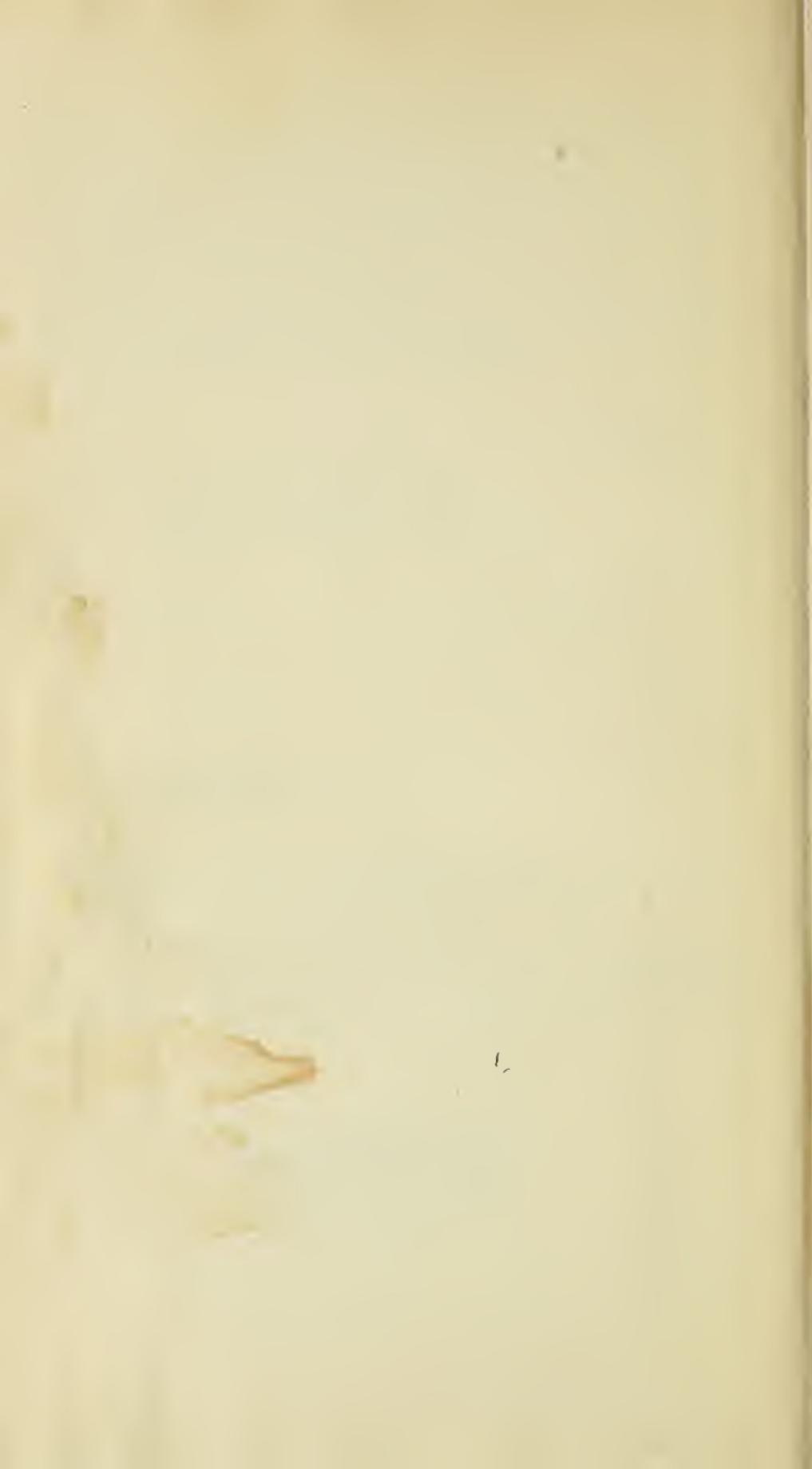
Six hundred copies, at 3s. each, would produce £90; and if there were no more to be deducted from that sum than the expenses of paper, print, and stitching, there would remain upwards of £54 as profit. The poet, however, speaks of realising only £20 by the speculation.



Edinburgh.
Printed by W. and R. Chambers.

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